Dragon #361
This issue features even more detailed 4th Edition coverage, on everything from dwarves to bulettes. We'll also be featuring a crossover between the Exemplars of Evil and Elder Evils supplements to prepare you for Dungeon's "Essence of Evil" adventure, more members of the Infernal Aristocracy, more Realmslore and Expeditionary Dispatches, and a new Ecology.

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You thought we were done? It's impossible to count the number of diabolical, unique personalities scheming in Hell. We've got five more here, ready to terrorize your D&D game.
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Do cheaters ever prosper? Playing in multiple groups is right for some, but not for others. But how do you know? And what happens when your group envy gets the better of you?
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The evil deities of D&D have churches all their own, but not all their followers are villains. These affiliations give non-evil PCs all the information they need to join one of these dark churches.
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The Ecology of

Living flames forged by blazing magic, fire archons exist to destroy. Overrun and consume, take all and leave nothing but ashes -- these are the desires that burn within fire archons' incandescent souls from their first moments.
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Critical Hits (Page 53)
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Critical hits are still around, but with a different spin in 4th Edition. Check out everything you need to know about maxing your crits right here.
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The bulette is back! Check out how this classic **D&D** monster is updated in 4th Edition, and get a sneak preview of what we mean when we call a monster "elite."
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What other game features a drunken beholder, vampire assassin, and drow barkeep? Designer Rob Heinsoo discusses *Inn-Fighting*: the dice game of champions (or at least, of tavern-goers) in the D&D world!
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Magic Item Levels (Page 60)
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Magic Item Compendium marked the first time levels were given to magic items. See how this concept is being implemented in 4th Edition.
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Paladin Smites (Page 62)
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Smiting has always seemed to come naturally to paladins, but in 4th Edition, it takes on whole new layers of meaning.
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It's not just kill and loot anymore. While quests have always been an integral part of the D&D experience, the new quest system will make your character's personal goals and motivations even more relevant to your adventures.
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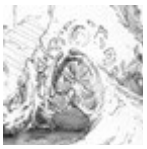
Third Edition heightened the importance of terrain in an encounter, but 4th Edition makes the battlefield an even more integral part of the combat experience.
by Stephen Radney-MacFarland

Traps! (Page 68)
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Traps are back, and now they're an integral part of the D&D encounter. Check out the design decisions behind the traps of 4th Edition.
by Stephen Radney-MacFarland

Gamer Lifestyle (Page 70)
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If you're interested in adding to the content available to your fellow gamers, you definitely need to check out our latest call for website articles. Find out more about *Gamer Lifestyle*, and perhaps you'll see your own contribution posted on the website at some future date!

Where's the Beef? (Page 72)
Dragon Editorial

We know you've been wondering about the mechanical content in **Dragon**, so we're giving you a first-hand look at the process behind the current editorial calendar.
by Chris Thomasson

A Fractured Family

Elvish Strife, Separation, and Rebirth

by James Wyatt

Once they were a single race: The elves say they were elves, the eladrin say they were eladrin. The drow say they were debased, unfinished, and fatally flawed, and would have stayed that way but for the help of Lolth.

In the younger days of creation, a fey race walked the borders between the world and the Feywild. Corellon and the two sisters, Sehanine and Lolth, delighted in this race, for all three gods saw in them the qualities they most valued. Corellon prized them for their artistry, their innate sense for the ebb and flow of magic, their song, and their fierce anger in battle. Sehanine loved their stealth, their gentle footsteps in the shadows of the forest, and their curiosity and wonder at the newborn world. And Lolth particularly enjoyed those who sought power and seized it, who spied and schemed to achieve their goals, who showed no mercy to their enemies or their rivals.

For this young race, like most of the fey, had a very different sense of morality from that of other races. Moradin, Pelor, and Bahamut taught their followers the noble path of law and good, encouraged them to shun evil, value life, and build societies that protected their weaker citizens. The elves, though, were as changing as the seasons and the moon, mercurial in their passions. Corellon taught them to love beauty and savor life but to kill in an ecstatic fury of blasting magic and whirling blade when they faced their enemies in battle. Sehanine taught them to find their own paths without any particular ethical code. And Lolth extended Sehanine's doctrine to its extreme, teaching the elves to place their own goals above all other cares and to stop at nothing to achieve them.

The elves as a race were neither good nor evil -- they didn't think in those terms. They enjoyed beauty and pleasure, and many of them found pleasure in kindness and beauty in every facet of life, and so acted in good ways. Still, they might inflict pain or even death, not out of cruelty, but purely out of curiosity. Others found pleasure in causing pain, and turned their path to evil.

Sehanine, god of the full moon, was fair-skinned and dark-haired, while Lolth, god of the new moon, was the opposite. As the race of elves spread and built their first cities, Lolth marked her favorites -- those elves who delighted in murder and destruction -- by matching their coloration to hers. Even before Lolth's rebellion, these dark-skinned elves began to claim the name of drow, an ugly Elven word that refers to the things that haunt the night.

Up to this point, the legends and histories of the three races mostly agree. Some details may differ -- most notably the name by which the unified race was known -- but the broad outline is the same. With the rebellion of Lolth, however, the histories diverge. They agree on the fact of Lolth's revolt: She turned against her sister and Corellon and led her chosen ones in battle against the other elves. The reason for her revolt is less clear. The most common legends include the following:

- Lolth grew tired of sharing her power and authority with Sehanine and tried to kill her sister, to claim the shadows and the moon as her exclusive domain.
- Lolth was jealous of the affection between Corellon and her sister and tried to kill one or the other of them.
- Lolth descended into the Elemental Chaos and even plumbed the Abyss in a search for knowledge or power, and she made alliances with demons -- and then Corellon and Sehanine sought to punish her blasphemy.
- Or Lolth believed that her chosen people should rule the elf race and led them to seize power, which only then resulted in conflict among the gods.

Whatever the reason for the revolt of Lolth and the drow, the consequences were devastating. War tore through the shining fey cities and consumed the woodlands of the world with fire. Some say that the world and the Feywild grew more distant from each other, making passage between them more difficult and driving a wedge between the elves who favored one over the other. Ultimately, the drow were cut off and banished from elf and eladrin communities, driven into the dark places of the world, the Feywild, and the Shadowfell. Lolth made her home in the Abyss, taking the title of the Demon Queen of Spiders.

By the end of the rebellion, the elves, the eladrin, and the drow were three distinct races. Each was shaped by the nature of their home and the favor of their gods

Whatever the history and legend of their origin, the elves of the present day are very much creatures of the world. Though still fey in their nature, they are attuned to the world and its primal power, at home in the woodlands, and they live in harmony with the beasts and trees that share their home.

Since the revolt of the drow, the elves have walked quietly over the earth, leaving little trace. As kingdoms and empires grew and collapsed -- the human realm of Nerath, the dragonborn Arkhosia, the tiefling Bael Turath, and countless nations before them -- the elves remained in their woodland homes, mostly unaffected by the rise and fall of nations. On a few occasions, the eladrin built kingdoms in the world. Sometimes these kingdoms sought cordial relations with their elf neighbors, and elves and eladrin lived as close as they ever had since Lolth's rebellion. At other times, the eladrin tried to force the elves into a reunion of the races and met bitter resistance. There can be no doubt, now, that the two races will never again be one.

Shunning kingdoms of their own, the elves no longer build cities as their ancestors did, but make their homes among the trees. They live in family or clan units, sleeping in tents or under the stars as they range through the forests and gather what they need to survive. At other times, they in temporary villages built on platforms in the branches, linked by vines and ropes -- almost a natural part of the trees themselves. They roam with the seasons, following animals on their migrations or journeying to where fruits and nuts grow in greatest abundance. At least twice a year -- at midsummer and midwinter -- elf families and clans gather together to observe the turning of the seasons, share stories and news of the recent months, and celebrate marriages, births, and deaths.

In the darkness that has been growing since the fall of Nerath, the elves find it more and more difficult to maintain their traditional ways. Many of their forests are no longer safe even for their keen-eyed archers and hardy warriors. Some forests have burned to their roots, driving the elves to find safe refuge in the better-defended settlements of other races. Where, in the past, it was unusual to find elves in human towns except as traders, now many elf families have taken up permanent residence among humans, halflings, and even dwarves, joining with these other races for protection against the darkness.

As a race, elves are fleet of foot and agile. Though they are by no means stupid, they do not place the same value on learning and intellect that their eladrin cousins do. Rather, they value the wisdom of years and the truth of intuition and insight. Their more comic legends are full of eladrin who are puffed up with their own knowledge but lack even a modicum of common sense, and cunning elf heroes who trick their foolish cousins.

Elves share a passionate and emotional nature with many of their fey cousins. They experience feelings deeply and intensely, and their emotions are often mercurial. An elf can swing from wailing grief to heartfelt laughter in a moment, and as quickly to burning rage. They make bitter enemies, sometimes clinging to grudges through long generations, but they are reliable and compassionate friends who remember gratitude longer than wrongs.

Many elves still revere Corellon and (particularly) Sehanine, but many others worship Melora, god of the wilds where they make their homes. Even those elves who drift toward evil rarely turn to Lolth. The legend of her rebellion stings too much. Instead, they worship the Raven Queen, Zehir, or occasionally savage Gruumsh.

For many elves, the gods are not much different from the clan elders who have moved on from this life to another. They remember the gods in thanks and might pray for insight, but not many elves become champions of any god's ideals as a cleric or paladin. They are not as fascinated with arcane magic as their eladrin cousins, often growing impatient with its intricacies and precision. They are drawn more to mastery of primal power, which keeps them attuned to the natural world with its spirits and forces. Elf rangers, rogues, druids, and barbarians are the most common adventurers.

Eladrin: A Race Apart

The eladrin claim to be the original race from which both elves and drow split, with the (usually) unspoken implication that both other races fell away from the state of near-perfection that the eladrin embody. Certainly, the eladrin are still the most fey of the three elf races, still steeped in the magic of the Feywild and still the favored children of Corellon. Arcane magic suffuses their bodies and souls, sometimes emanating from them in a soft nimbus of fey light.

Many races of the world can look back in history to a shining example of their ancestors' accomplishments: the dragonborn empire of Arkhosia or the human realm of Nerath, for example. When the eladrin reflect back on their days of glory, they think first and foremost of the time before Lolth's rebellion, when the whole Feywild shined with the light of the eladrin cities. Those cities now lie in ruins, still hauntingly beautiful among the fey forests with moonlight shining on their shattered spires and ivory walls, but haunting in their testimony to the violence of the rebellion.

Eladrin still build towers of graceful beauty in the grandest places of the Feywild -- breathtaking gorges and verdant glens -- and sometimes even among the ruins of their ancient cities. But no eladrin city of the present day, or of the past hundred centuries, can compare to the heights of the

eladrin race in that mythic time before. Eladrin cities of the present day are usually little more than a single ivory spire rising above a scattering of smaller homes, all built in perfect harmony with their surroundings as if carved from the earth by wind and rain.

There have been times in the history of the world when eladrin tried to rebuild the ancient glory of a united race, extending their city-states into the natural world and making overtures to nearby elf communities. These dreams of kingdoms that would bridge the worlds have always crumbled to dust with the passing of years, usually within the span of a single generation.

Eladrin society has more in common with the human structures of nobility and rulership than it does with the family-based society of the elves. Noble houses ruled by eladrin with titles such as Bralani of Autumn Winds or Ghaele of Winter govern tiny princedoms scattered across the Feywild. The eladrin swear loyalty to their noble protectors, who promise to help defend them against fomorians and other dangers of the fey darkness. Unlike human rulers, these noble eladrin wield tremendous power derived from a close connection to the magic of the Feywild, so their tiny city-states do remain as lights, however dim and flickering, standing against the encroaching darkness.

Eladrin share the grace and agility of their elf cousins but place more value on the developed intellect than on intuition and emotion. All eladrin are scholars to some degree, versed in the history of their race and the theories of magic and more inclined to calculate possible solutions than to run with a gut feeling.

The eladrin can seem cold and emotionless to outsiders, if sometimes capricious, and they are certainly less passionate than the elves. Their grief manifests as a wistful melancholy, their pleasure as a soft smile, and their anger as a simmering glare. Much like the elves, they have long memories for both gifts and grudges.

Most eladrin worship Corellon and Sehanine. Some temples in the Feywild are still arranged as they were before Lolth's rebellion -- built as three interlocking circles, each with its altar to one of the three elf gods. In most of these temples, Lolth's altar has been destroyed or defaced. Sometimes it is draped with black cloth to hide it from view, and sometimes it is visible but simply unadorned. There are eladrin who believe that the three gods will one day be reconciled, just as the three races will again be one.

Some say that Corellon's dominion of Arborea lies in the Feywild, while others claim it floats in the Astral Sea. It's possible that it drifts between the worlds or somehow exists in both places at once. To the eladrin mind, Arborea is perhaps not so different from the court of any noble eladrin -- larger and more magnificent, perhaps, but a place where any eladrin would feel at home, even in the presence of so great a lord as the noble Corellon. Sehanine, it's said, wanders freely in and out of Corelllon's home but spends much of her time in the Feywild, where travelers might stumble across her path. Some who attend one of Sehanine's moonlit feasts are said to become lost for centuries, while others awaken after a single night to find themselves blessed with gifts and powers beyond their imagining.

More so than the elves, eladrin sometimes become champions of a god in much the same way that one might become a fey knight in service to a noble eladrin. Divine magic is not alien to the eladrin, but arcane magic is their love and part of their nature. Eladrin wizards are far more common than warlocks, sorcerers, or bards, but any form of arcane magic is a source of endless fascination for the race.

Noble Eladrin

The lords and ladies that rule the eladrin are powerful fey who embody the character of the race. Their magic is tied to seasons and emotions. A ghaele might lash out with a blast of wintry cold, while a coure sows strife among her enemies. They are enigmatic and aloof and can be very capricious, especially when mortals venture into their domains. The tale of Ferrin Toth, a human wizard who ventured into the Feywild seeking arcane secrets, illustrates the nature of the noble eladrin.

Proud of his knowledge and confident in his arcane power, Ferrin Toth used a ritual to transport himself into the Feywild. After parting the veil between worlds, he found himself in a lovely valley with a crystalline spire rising beside a sparkling waterfall at the valley's head. He presented himself at the palace gate in the late afternoon, asking for an audience with the ruler of the place.

Two women escorted him into the presence of their lord Immeral, Firre of Passion. Warm braziers lit the audience hall against the approaching twilight and fire seemed to dance in the opalescent eyes of the eladrin lord. He welcomed the human wizard graciously, descending from his throne to escort the traveler on a tour through the palace. Ferrin lingered by the doorway to the eladrin's magnificent library, but Immeral told him he could explore the library in the morning. Ferrin tried to protest -- there was still enough daylight for him to read -- but the eladrin wouldn't hear him. He hurried Ferrin to a luxurious guest room, warned him not to leave the room until dawn's light burned on the horizon, and left him alone.

Ferrin couldn't sleep. His glimpse of the lord's great library tormented him, and desire to plumb its secrets consumed him. When the palace was silent and the full moon glittered in its spires, Ferrin crept from his room and tried to retrace his steps to the library. As he walked, the corridors seemed to twist in on themselves, and soon the gleaming crystal walls melted into thickets of briars. He wandered through what had become a labyrinth until dawn began to brighten the sky. Then the two women who had brought him to the lord's audience hall stepped out of the thickets. Their lovely faces and forms vanished in a flash, revealing monstrous creatures of wood and vine, swinging arms like mighty cudgels at him.

With a word of refuge, Ferrin returned to the sanctum of his own tower. But the vision of the Firre of Passion's library haunted him. Every night he tossed and turned on his bed, thinking of the library and the wonders he had glimpsed through its doorway. Every morning, when dawn's light burned on the horizon, he thought he stood again in that doorway, and hope surged in his chest -- but as soon as the sun rose above the distant hills, his vision cleared and he was still in his tower. Many times he returned to the Feywild, but he was never able to find Immeral's palace again.

Drow: Lolth's Chosen

The drow are creatures of evil and darkness, exiles banished to the subterranean realms beneath the Feywild, the world, and the Shadowfell. Their ties to the forests and valleys of nature are cut, and they live by cruelty and domination, no longer in harmony with the beasts of the wild.

The drow build their cities deep underground, their slender spires and feylit towers echoing or mocking the graceful eladrin cities of the Feywild. Their society is a study in paradox. Within a drow city, various families or houses hold power. A drow without a connection to one of these houses is an outcast, and members of other races are rarely anything but slaves to these houses. The drow are inclined to empire, unlike their cousins, and the well-ordered houses would perhaps conquer both the Underdark and the surface world were it not for Lolth and her priests. Lolth is a god of treachery and chaos, and at her urging, her priests lead the house matrons in constant battles for dominance. Even when a single house manages to cling to power for an extended time, it must be constantly vigilant against the threat of a lesser house trying to claim its position, and struggles among the lesser houses prevent the city from acting in anything like a concerted effort toward conquest.

Drow share the agility of their cousins, which they often put to use in stealth and trickery. Although they are no taller than eladrins, they have a presence that often makes members of other races feel smaller and on edge -- a fury seems to be at constant boil behind their blank white eyes, ready to explode at the slightest provocation. Like the elves, their moods can change in an instant, most often transforming into blind, murderous rage.

The drow remain Lolth's own, and they tolerate the worship of no other god. The names of Corellon and Sehanine are blasphemy to a drow's ears, and even a euphemistic reference to either god is accompanied by spitting on the ground. The drow revere spiders because Lolth chose them as her symbol, and they traffic with demons because Lolth has made some demons her servants. The priests of Lolth hold political as well as spiritual power, serving as advisers to the house matrons if not actually filling that position themselves. Drow society revolves around Lolth, though it means a constant state of civil upheaval.

While elves and eladrin are inclined to view the gods as simply a greater form of their own lords and elders, the drow give Lolth their unquestioning devotion. Far more drow follow divine paths to become clerics or paladins than either elves or eladrin do -- perhaps in part because of the temporal authority that comes with service to Lolth but also for the opportunity to commune more closely with their god and savor her power flowing through them. They have not forgotten their heritage of arcane study, however, and produce many mighty wizards and warlocks. While religion and politics are primarily the arena of women among the drow, the arcane masters of the race are mostly men.

The more high-minded elves and eladrin sometimes take a compassionate view of the drow, perhaps believing that the three races might one day be reunited. The drow, on the other hand, permit no such weakness of thought, as they see it. Whatever their short-term plans of conquest or rebellion, the drow long for the day when they will exterminate their kindred, obliterating the stain of elves and eladrin from the world and the Feywild. Only occasionally do these dreams manifest in any kind of action, but drow have been seen fighting alongside fomorians in the Feywild.

Without a doubt, the aspirations of the drow echo the dreams and schemes of Lolth, the Spider Queen. In her Abyssal domain of the Demonweb Pits, she sits and waits, plotting the day when she can snare her sister and Corellon in her webs and finish the work she started at the dawn of time.

And then the three races will be only one.**Drow As Player Characters**

With the release of the *Forgotten Realms Campaign Setting* in the summer of of '08, drow will be presented as a fully playable character race. Although drow as a race are a singularly wicked people, cruel and treacherous in their dealings with others, a smattering in every generation learn cooperation and the value of alliance. While some of these are merely cunning in their decision to gain the trust of others, a few truly come to value the positive aspects of camaraderie and friendship, sometimes even with those not of their own race.

Play a drow if you¦

- want to be good at skulking about, striking quick, and employing a variety of dirty tactics;
- enjoy playing a hero in search of redemption and who struggles to rise above the wickedness of his people;

?are considering a ranger, rogue, warlock.

About the Author

James Wyatt is the Lead Story Designer for **D&D** and one of the lead designers of **D&D** 4th Edition. In over seven years at Wizards of the Coast, he has authored or co-authored award-winning adventures and settings including the *Eberron Campaign Setting, City of the Spider Queen*, and *Oriental Adventures*. His more recent work includes *Expedition to Castle Ravenloft, Cormyr: The Tearing of the Weave*, and *The Forge of War*. His second *Eberron* novel, *Storm Dragon*, released in September.

Infernal Aristocracy

The Dukes of Hell, Part II

by Robert J. Schwalb
art by Marc Sasso
12/12/2007

Dragon Features Archive
Dragon 361

Fiendish Codex II describes in detail the path of infernal advancement, highlighting the various castes making up the twisted societal norms of the baatezu. While much is written about the differences between the greater, lesser, and least devils, there is yet one more classification that bears -- no, demands mentioning. These beings are the dukes of Hell, fiends that are more than the greater devils but less than the archdevils, lacking demesnes of their own and forced into positions of service. In many cases, these dukes are pit fiends, powerful and named versions of the greatest of the greater devils. Others, however, are unique, baatezu that have their own capabilities, powers, and motives that place them above even the mightiest pit fiends. It is these few, these rare and powerful dukes, that this article explores.

Back in October, we gave you a look inside the aristocracy of Hell with the first "Dukes of Hell" article. Now, we're back with more of these diabolical courtiers. Each hungers to rule one of Hell's nine layers, and strains ”openly or with unmatched subtlety”to climb the ladder of power. As rigid as the hierarchy of Hell seems to the outsider, opportunities for advancement are frequent, and this endless competition allows only the cream of evil to rise to the top.

What the Hell?

After flipping through the pages of this article, you're probably noticing the dukes described here are as powerful or more powerful than the archdevils presented in the *Fiendish Codex II*. This is intentional. The archdukes in the *Fiendish Codex II* are aspects, manifestations having but a fragment of the archdevil's power. The dukes described here are the real deal. They lack the ability to create aspects and thus when encountered, they are nearly always in their true form.

This said, the Challenge Ratings for these characters, while high, are not much higher than those of pit fiends and many are less are than some of the other tough monsters out there -- specifically the abominations described in the *Epic Level Handbook*. You should consider the statistics presented in this article to be the baseline. If your campaign features creatures with CRs in the 30s, 40s, or higher, you should advance these devils to make them appropriate adversaries. Simply use the guidelines laid out in Chapter 4: Improving Monsters in the *Monster Manual* and modify the stats according to the desired CR.

Other Sources

This article references several other sourcebooks. Where a reference is given in the text, it uses a parenthetical abbreviation. Referenced sourcebooks and their abbreviations are here.

Abbreviation	Reference
CAr	*Complete Arcane*
CW	*Complete Warrior*
FC1	*Fiendish Codex I*
FC2	*Fiendish Codex II*
PH2	*Players Handbook II*
MI	*Magic Item Compendium*
MM3	*Monster Manual III*
ToM	*Tome of Magic*

Common Attack Options

The Dukes of Hell have one or both of the following attack options.

Aligned Strike: Attacks made by a creature that has this ability are treated as aligned for the purpose of overcoming damage reduction.

Epic Strike: Attacks made by a creature that has this ability are treated as epic for the purpose of overcoming damage reduction.

Agares

This being stands some eight feet tall. Ancient, frail and brittle, his body is gnarled and grotesque, and he leans heavily on an iron-shod staff. When he speaks, he does so in a quavering voice. Perched on his left wrist is a vicious eagle, with iron feathers and hate-filled eyes. Emerging from beneath his long robes are scaly gray reptilian feet. Bloody red eyes glare out from his ruddy features. Small stubby gray horns emerge from his head, and tufts of a gray beard sprout from his wrinkled chin. His nails are long, red, and hooked, perfect for rending flesh from the bone.

Agares CR 22
hp 367 (35 HD); regeneration 10; **DR** 15/epic and good

LE Large Outsider (baatezu, evil, extraplanar, lawful)
Init +3; **Senses** see in darkness; Listen +7, Spot +7
Aura fear (100 ft., DC 33)
Languages *tongues*; telepathy 100 ft.

AC 43, touch 17, flat-footed 40; Dodge, Mobility, Two-Weapon Defense (-1 size, +3 Dex, +5 deflection, +26 natural)
Immune fire, poison, mind-affecting effects
Resist acid 10, cold 10; **SR** 33
Fort +25, **Ref** +24, **Will** +28

Speed 40 ft. (8 squares); Spring Attack
Melee*iron-shod staff* +47/+42/+37/+32 (1d8+17) or
Melee *iron-shod staff* (double weapon) +45/+40/+35/+30 and +45/+40 (1d8+17) or
Melee 2 claws +42 (1d6+8)

Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 10 ft.
Base Atk +35; **Grp** +47
Atk Options Brand of the Nine Hells (Levistus), Combat Expertise, Mark of Stygia, Vengeful Surge, aligned strike (evil, lawful), epic strike
Special Actions*summon baatezu*
Combat Gear*metamagic rod of reach spell*
Cleric Spells Prepared (CL 20th, 1d20+20 to overcome SR):
9th -- *energy drain* (ranged touch +37), *implosion* (DC 26), *investiture of the pit fiend* (DC 26, *FC2* 105)D, *soul bind* (DC 26), *summon monster IX*
8th -- *antimagic field*, *demand* (DC 25)D, *dimensional lock*, *greater spell immunity*, *unholy aura* (DC 25)
7th -- *blasphemy* (DC 24), *destruction* (DC 24), *dictum* (CL 21st, DC 24), *greater scrying* (DC 24), *hellfire storm* (*BV*)D, *repulsion* (DC 24)
6th -- *banishment* (DC 23), *blade barrier* (DC 23, *PH* 205), *geas/quest*, *harm* (melee touch +42, DC 23), *hold monster* (DC 23)D, *symbol of persuasion* (DC 23)
5th -- *dispel chaos* (CL 21st, DC 22)D, *flame strike* (DC 22), *greater command* (DC 22), *dispel good* (DC 22), *plane shift* (melee touch +42, DC 22), *slay living* (melee touch +42, DC 22), *true seeing*
4th -- *air walk*, *cure critical wounds*, *discern lies* (DC 21), *divine power*, *freedom of movement*, *hellfire* (*BV*)D, *sending*
3rd -- *bestow curse* (melee touch +42, DC 20), *blindness/deafness* (DC 20), *contagion* (melee touch +42, DC 20), *deeper darkness* (2), *dispel magic*, *invisibility purge*, *magic circle against chaos*
2nd -- *calm emotions* (DC 19)D, *desecrate*, *hold person* (DC 19), *resist energy*, *silence*, *undetectable alignment* (2), *zone of truth* (DC 19)
1st -- *bane* (DC 18), *command* (DC 18), *divine favor*, *doom* (DC 18), *obscuring mist*, *protection from good*, *sanctuary* (DC 18), *shield of faith*
0 -- *detect magic* (3), *resistance* (2), *read magic*
D: Domain spell. Domains: Diabolic, Law.

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 20th):
At will -- *crushing despair* (DC 20), *earthquake*, *greater teleport* (self plus 50 lb. of objects only), *hold monster* (DC 21), *greater dispel magic*, *ice storm*, *limited wish* (fulfill another's wish only), *see invisibility*, *slow* (DC 19), *wall of ice*
1/day -- *symbol of pain* (DC 21)

Abilities Str 26, Dex 17, Con 22, Int 29, Wis 24, Cha 23
SQ animal companion, link with companion, share spells
Feats Brand of the Nine Hells (Levistus) (*FC2*), Combat Expertise, Dodge, Improved Two-Weapon Fighting, Iron Will, Lightning Reflexes, Mark of Stygia (*FC2*), Mobility, Spring Attack, Two-Weapon Defense, Two-Weapon Fighting, Vengeful Surge (*FC2*)
Skills Appraise +47, Bluff +44, Decipher Script +47, Diplomacy +48, Disguise +6 (+8 acting), Forgery +47, Intimidate +46, Knowledge (arcana) +47, Knowledge (architecture) +47, Knowledge (dungeoneering) +47, Knowledge (geography) +47, Knowledge (history) +47, Knowledge (nobility) +47, Knowledge (religion) +47, Knowledge (the planes) +47, Search +47 (+49 secret doors), Sense Motive +45, Spellcraft +49, Survival +7 (+9 on other planes, +9 following tracks, +9 underground, +9 avoiding getting lost and hazards)
Possessions combat gear plus *iron-shod staff*, *ring of protection +5*, *crystal ball with true seeing*, *ring of freedom of movement*

Aura of Fear (Su) At the end of each of Agares's turns, creatures within 100 feet of him must make DC 33 Will saves or be panicked for 10 rounds. A creature that successfully saves cannot be affected again by Agares's aura for 24 hours. Baatezu are immune to the aura. The save DC is Charisma-based.
Tongues (Su) As the *tongues* spell, always active, caster level 20th.
Regeneration (Ex) Epic and good-aligned weapons and spells and spell-like effects with the good descriptor deal normal damage to Agares. If Agares loses a limb or body part, the lost portion regrows in 1 minute. Agares can reattach the severed member instantly by holding it to the stump.
Iron-Shod Staff Agares's iron-shod staff counts as a *+5 good outsider bane unholy cold iron quarterstaff*.
Summon Baatezu (Sp) 65% chance to summon 1d6+2 bone devils 1/day; caster level 20th. This ability is the equivalent of a 9th-level spell

Agares is an opportunistic duke who has managed to keep his place and status despite the upheaval troubling Stygia.

Strategies and Tactics
Agares is not one to enter a combat lightly. He uses subterfuge and diplomacy to resolve disputes. Once the matter has been settled, he scurries away to plot his revenge and destroy his foes from afar.

Failing this, Agares unleashes a terrible barrage of spells, using his offensive spells first to put a little distance between himself and his opponents. *Energy drain* and *implosion* are usually followed by *unholy aura*, *blade barrier*, or even *repulsion*. If his spells have little effect, he takes the time to cast *summon monster IX* to conjure a barbed devil to cover his retreat.

Servants, Enemies, and Goals
Agares achieved his place of power as a reward for constant service to the archdevils. A loyal servant of Geryon, Agares served his master well, but at every turn, Amon, his ancient rival and enemy, frustrated him. That Geryon could not see Amon's duplicity fueled Agares anger, leading the duke little other recourse than to smear his rival's name. He fed lies about Amon and Geryon to agents of Asmodeus in the hopes of attaining the Lord of Nessus' intercession on his behalf. His plan worked, to an extent, but not they way he hoped.

Asmodeus, on the heels of the Reckoning, destroyed Geryon and cast out Amon, driving him into exile. Agares held to the hope that he might succeed his master, but instead of advancing his own status, treacherous Levistus was promoted in his stead, awakened in the glacier that held him prisoner after the murder of Asmodeus's consort and mother of Glasya.

With Levistus the Lord of Stygia, Agares was one of two of the old guard who stayed - the other was a minor duke named Machalas. Levistus warily named Agares general of 31 legions of devils and gave him control over the eastern extent of the layer.

Not content with this expanded power, and having learned the lesson of what it meant to treat with Asmodeus, Agares has turned to Set, spending an inordinate amount of time in the evil god's court. Some speculate Agares intends to enlist Set's assistance in starting a coup to oust and destroy Levistus in exchange for aiding Set in expanding his domain into Malbolge. Whether true or not, his cunning and plotting has bought the attention of many powerful infernal lords and many suspect that Agares's days are numbered.

Mortal cultists often mistake Agares as a mild infernal duke, for his ways are not as destructive or as sinister as are his peers. Agares delights in driving mortals to speak immoral expressions that gradually grow worse and worse until the things said are so foul that hearing them can stain a mortal's very soul.

Harbinger

Agares is rarely without his companion, Harbinger, a fiendish legendary eagle of unspeakable cruelty and violence. The eagle has crimson feathers and black eyes that weep ochre pus. It perches on Agares's wrist, burrowing its claws into his arm.

Harbinger CR 12
hp 204 (24 HD); **DR** 10/magic

Fiendish Advanced Legendary Eagle
NE Small Magical Beast (augmented animal, extraplanar)
Init +14; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft., low-light vision; Listen +18, Spot +30

AC 40, touch 24, flat-footed 27; Dodge (+1 size, +13 Dex, +16 natural)
Resist cold 10, fire 10; improved evasion; **SR** 25
Fort +18, **Ref** +27, **Will** +11 (+15 against enchantments)

Speed 10 ft. (2 squares), fly 100 ft. (average); Hover, Flyby Attack
Melee 2 claws +32 (1d8+6/19-20) and bite +30 (1d8+3)
Base Atk +18; **Grp** +20
Atk Options*smite good* 1/day (+20 damage)

Abilities Str 22, Dex 36, Con 18, Int 3, Wis 17, Cha 13
SQ link with master, devotion (included above)
Feats Alertness, Dodge, Flyby Attack, Hover, Improved Critical (claws), Improved Initiative, Improved Natural Attack (claws), MultiattackB, Skill Focus (Spot)
Skills Listen +18, Spot +30

Tartach

This towering giant of a man wears long black robes of the finest silk. He has fiery orange skin and a black beard and moustache, with stubby, hooked horns sprouting from his forehead. Emerging from beneath the hem of his robes are two lion's feet.

Tartach CR 24
hp 580 (40 HD); regeneration 10; **DR** 15/epic and good

LE Large Outsider (baatezu, evil, extraplanar, lawful)
Init +7; **Senses** see in darkness; Listen +50, Spot +50
Languages*tongues*; telepathy 150 ft.

AC 42, touch 16, flat-footed 35; Dodge, Mobility (-1 size, +7 Dex, +8 armor, +18 natural)
Immune fire and poison
Resist acid 10 and cold 10; **SR** 34
Fort +32, **Ref** +29, **Will** +31

Speed 40 ft. (8 squares)
Melee*+4 axiomatic flaming burst longsword* +56/+51/+46/+41 (2d6+23/17-20 plus 1d6 fire [1d10 on crit] plus 2d6 against chaotic)
Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 10 ft.
Base Atk +40; **Grp** +57
Atk Options Combat Expertise, Combat Reflexes, Quicken Spell-Like Ability (*fireball*), Supernatural Instincts, Vengeful Surge, aligned strike (evil, lawful), epic strike
Special Actions Dark Speech, Mark of Malbolge, paralyzing gaze, *summon baatezu*
Combat Gear*rod of enemy detection, rope of entanglement*
Sorcerer Spells Known (CL 20th):
9th (8/day) -- *hellish horde* (*SC*), *Mordenkainen's disjunction* (DC 32), *time stop*
8th (8/day) -- *dimensional lock*, *protection from spells*, *superior invisibility* (*SC*)
7th (8/day) -- *banishment*, *project image*, *stun ray* (ranged touch +46) (*SC*)

6th (8/day) -- *fleshshiver* (DC 29) (*SC*), *globe of invulnerability*, *permanent image*
5th (9/day) -- *dominate person* (DC 28), *fabricate*, *spiritwall* (*SC*), *telekinesis* (DC 28)
4th (9/day) -- *charm monster* (DC 27), *greater rebuke* (DC 27), *orb of force* (ranged touch +46) (*SC*), *scrying* (DC 27)
3rd (9/day) -- *bands of steel* (DC 26)SC, *blink*, *haste*, *lightning bolt* (DC 26)
2nd (9/day) -- *baleful transposition* (DC 25) (*SC*), *daze monster* (DC 25), *mirror image*, *swift fly* (*SC*), *whispering wind*
1st (10/day) -- *lesser orb of fire* (ranged touch +46) (SC), *magic missile*, *ray of enfeeblement* (ranged touch +46), *swift expeditious retreat* (*SC*), *true strike*
0 (6/day) -- *arcane mark*, *detect magic*, *ghost sound* (DC 23), *light*, *mage hand*, *mending*, *open/close*, *prestidigitation*, *read magic*
Spell-Like Abilities (CL 20th):
At will -- *fireball* (DC 26), *greater dispel magic*, *greater teleport* (self plus 50 lbs. of objects only), *limited wish*, *pyrotechnics* (DC 25), *see invisibility*, *wall of fire*
1/day -- *feeblemind* (DC 28), *symbol of stunning* (DC 30)

Abilities Str 36, Dex 25, Con 30, Int 25, Wis 24, Cha 37
Feats Brand of the Nine Hells (Glasya) (*FC2*), Combat Expertise, Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Energy Substitution (Acid), Improved Critical (longsword), Iron Will, Mark of Malbolge (*FC2*), Mobility, Quick Draw, Quicken Spell-Like Ability (*fireball*), Quicken Spell-Like Ability (*greater dispel magic*), Supernatural Instincts (*FC2*), Vengeful Surge (*FC2*)
Skills Balance +9, Bluff +56, Concentration +53, Diplomacy +60, Disguise +13 (+15 acting), Gather Information +56, Hide +46, Intimidate +60, Jump +19, Knowledge (religion) +50, Knowledge (the planes) +50, Listen +50, Move Silently +50, Search +50, Sense Motive +50, Spellcraft +50, Spot +50, Survival +7 (+9 on other planes, +9 following tracks), Tumble +50
Possessions combat gear plus *+4 axiomatic flaming burst longsword, bracers of armor +8, cloak of Charisma +6, darkskull,* 2 diamonds (500 gp for protection from spells), diamond (1,000 gp focus for protection from spells), 3 small replicas of Tartach (5 gp each for *project image*), 3 pinches of powdered jade (100 gp each for *permanent image*), spell component pouch

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Tongues (Su) As the *tongues* spell, always active, caster level 20th.
Regeneration (Ex) Epic and good-aligned weapons and spells and spell-like effects with the good descriptor deal normal damage to Tartach. If Tartach loses a limb or body part, the lost portion regrows in 1 minute. Tartach can reattach the severed member instantly by holding it to the stump.
Paralyzing Gaze (Su) Fear, range 90 ft. A creature meeting Tartach's gaze must succeed on a DC 43 Will save or be paralyzed with fear for 10 rounds. Whether or not the save is successful, that creature cannot be affected again by Tartach's gaze for 24 hours. This is a mind-affecting fear effect. The save DC is Charisma-based.
Summon Baatezu (Sp) 70% chance to summon 1d3 malebranche 1/day; caster level 20th. This ability is the equivalent of a 9th-level spell.

Tartach is one of the only dukes left in Malbolge and he enjoys the affection of his mistress Glasya. He is noted as being cruel and takes pleasure from torturing weaker creatures, scrutinizing their expressions and savoring their screams as he slowly pulls them apart.

Strategies and Tactics
Tartach is one of the most dangerous spellcasters in the Nine Hells and he is certainly without peer on Malbolge -- except for possibly Glasya in her true form. Furthermore, his time and experience with intrigue has given him uncanny insight into strategic spellcasting. Unless he's caught unawares, he takes the time to prepare himself before being drawn into combat, usually by casting *superior invisibility* and protection from spells before using *greater teleport* to slip into the midst of his enemies. Once there, he hammers his opponents with quickened *fireballs* and *acidballs*.

Servants, Enemies, and Goals
Tartach has come a long way since his days as a celestial servant, and while Geryon never fully appreciated his talents, Glasya does, showering him with gifts and affection as she consolidates her hold over her new realm. One might think attaining the coveted place of Glasya's favored servant would be enough for one such as Tartach, but the duke has never known contentment. He always craves more status, more influence, more everything until one day Asmodeus himself would recognize his greatness. He sees his current position as yet another stepping stone and by ingratiating himself with the newest archdevil, she might pass along her satisfaction with his work and perhaps recommend him to replace another problematic archdevil, perhaps even Baalzebul himself.

Of course, Tartach is no fool and sees little chance Glasya will reward him as he hopes and so he spends his time plotting ways to create the circumstances he needs to advance. His part in Geryon's and Moloch's falls achieved much (see sidebar), and so he's looking for a way to ingratiate himself in the court of another archdevil, where he can sabotage the ruler and create weaknesses enough for another to come in and destroy the lord. Currently, Tartach has his eyes set on his old master, Baalzebul, whom he detests and finds foolish and weak, though he would never say so in the open.

Even as well-positioned as he his, he is not comfortable with his newfound power. Baalzebul has not concealed his hatred for his former servant and there have been many attempts against Tartach already. To make matters worse, he's learned that Moloch is stirring in Avernus, quietly drawing power to himself. Only a naive idiot would think that Moloch doesn't crave his former power and so Tartach believes it's just a matter of time before the exiled lord gains enough allies to make a serious attempt on his former layer.

Tartach's Machinations

Long had Tartach served two masters. When he descended into the Nine Hells, he bound his fate to Baalzebul, but the lord of Maladomini wasted no time dispatching Tartach to serve as legate to Moloch, who, then, ruled Malbolge. Although Tartach always maintained an appearance of loyalty to the Lord of Lies, he chafed at his assignment, believing he had been relegated to an inconsequential position, forgotten and removed to be less of a threat to his master.

Through the ages Tartach languished in Malbolge, he sought a way to escape his position and claim something of greater significance. The easiest path, in his mind, was to see Moloch cast down and thus open the path for his own ascent. So it was he entered the conspiracy with Geryon and Malagarde to manipulate events that would culminate in Moloch's fall, all the while plotting to double-cross the ambitious night hag and her archdevil ally.

As has been already discussed at great length, Moloch did indeed fall, but instead of Geryon extending his influence or Tartach claiming Malbolge for himself, Malagard neatly snatched the layer for herself. When she came to power, those dukes loyal to Moloch were exiled or destroyed, leaving Tartach to return to the court of Baalzebul where he was condemned to serve the abominable slug prince.

It was at the court of his old master that Tartach met and was seduced by Glasya. The daughter of Asmodeus had a reputation for caprice and working against the wishes of her father by consorting with his enemies and rivals. She had been Mammon's lover and had been teasing Baalzebul, all in the hopes of supplanting the Lord of the Seventh and claiming the layer for herself. She saw in Tartach a kindred spirit and convinced him to throw in his lot with hers.

Before her plots would bear fruit, Malagarde's aborted effort to ascend to godhood created a vacuum in the hierarchy of the Nine Hells, one Asmodeus was quick to fill by elevating his own daughter to become the new Lord of the Sixth. She left Maladomini, but before she did, she invited Tartach to accompany her and serve as her chamberlain.

-- *The Book of Fire*

Lilith

A striking woman of giant size emerges from the shadows, their dark substance clinging to her nubile form. Her skin is crimson and you can see curving horns emerging from her head. A suggestion of a tail whips behind her.

Lilith CR 25
hp 312 (25 HD); regeneration 10; **DR** 15/epic and good

LE Large Outsider (baatezu, evil, extraplanar, lawful)
Init +12; **Senses** in darkness; Listen +35, Spot +35
Aura desire (120 ft., DC 39)
Languages*tongues*; telepathy 300 ft.

AC 38, touch 21, flat-footed 26; Dodge, Mobility, uncanny dodge; 20% miss chance (-1 size, +12 Dex, +7 armor, +10 natural)
Immune fire and poison
Resist acid 10 and cold 10; **SR** 36
Fort +22, **Ref** +26, **Will** +21; slippery mind (second Will save against enchantments)

Speed 50 ft. (10 squares)
Melee*Lilith's caress* +40/+35/+30/+25 (1d4+8 plus 2d6 against good plus 1 vile plus exhaustion) and tail +31 (1d8+4 plus 1d6 acid plus 1 vile) or
Melee+*5 blurstrike scimitar* (*MIC*) +37/+32/+27/+22 (1d8+8/18-20 plus 1 vile) and tail +31 (1d8+4 plus 1d6 acid plus 1 vile) or
Melee 2 claws +36 (1d6+8 plus 1d6 acid plus 1 vile) and tail +31 (1d8+4 plus 1d6 acid plus 1 vile)
Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 10 ft.
Base Atk +25; **Grp** +41
Atk Options Combat Expertise, Improved Trip, aligned strike (evil, lawful), constrict, epic strike, improved grab, sneak attack +9d6
Special Actions change shape, *summon baatezu*
Combat Gear*tongue stud of hell breath* (*BV*), *vile weapon ring* (*BV*)
Spell-Like Abilities (CL 20th):
At will -- *charm monster* (DC 29), *create greater undead*, *deeper darkness*, *dominate monster* (DC 34), *fear* (DC 29), *fireball* (DC 28), *greater dispel magic*, *greater teleport* (self plus 50 lb. of objects only), *lightning bolt* (DC 28), *suggestion* (DC 28)
2/day -- *finger of death* (DC 32)

Abilities Str 26, Dex 35, Con 26, Int 25, Wis 24, Cha 41
SQ hide in plain sight
Feats Ability Focus (aura of desire), Brand of the Nine Hells (Baalzebul) (*FC2*), Combat Expertise, Dodge, Improved Critical (scimitar), Improved Trip, Mobility, Weapon Finesse, Weapon Focus (whip)
Skills Balance +14, Bluff +43, Concentration +36, Diplomacy +47, Disguise +43 (+45 acting), Escape Artist +44, Hide +36, Intimidate +45, Jump +46, Listen +35, Move Silently +40, Search +35, Sense Motive +35, Sleight of Hand +42, Spot +35, Survival +7 (+9 following tracks), Tumble +42, Use Rope +12 (+14 bindings)
Possessions combat gear plus *Lilith's caress*, *+5 blurstrike scimitar*, *bracers of armor +7*, *gloves of Dexterity +6*

Aura of Desire (Su) At the start of each of Lilith's turns, all living creatures within 120 feet must succeed on DC 39 Will saves or become overwhelmed with desire for her. Affected creatures have their attitudes changed to fanatic and willing give their lives for her and do whatever she instructs (ELH 40) for 1 round. Baatezu are immune to this ability.
Tongues (Ex) As the *tongues* spell, always active, caster level 20th.
Cloak of Shadows (Su) Shadows blanket Lilith's body, granting her concealment (20% miss chance). As an immediate action, up to three times per day, Lilith can intensify the darkness to grant herself total concealment (50% miss chance) for 5 rounds.
Regeneration (Ex) Epic and good-aligned weapons and spells and spell-like effects with the good descriptor deal normal damage to

Lilith. If Lilith loses a limb or body part, the lost portion regrows in 1 minute. Lilith can reattach the severed member instantly by holding it to the stump.

Lilith's Caress (Su) Lilith wields a unique magical weapon that functions as *+3 strength-sapping unholy barbed whip*. The strength-sapping quality forces any target struck to succeed on a DC 15 Fortitude save or become exhausted. This weapon deals lethal damage instead of nonlethal damage.
Improved Grab (Ex) To use this ability, Lilith must hit an opponent of up to Medium size with her tail attack. She can then attempt to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity. If she wins the grapple check, she establishes a hold and can constrict.
Constrict (Ex) Lilith deals 1d8+12 points of damage with a successful grapple check, in addition to the damage from her tail attack.
Change Shape (Su) Lilith can assume the form of any Small or Medium humanoid. Lilith remains in one form until she chooses to assume a new one. Lilith reverts to her natural form when killed. A *true seeing* spell reveals her natural form.
Summon Baatezu (Sp) 75% chance to summon 1d4+1 malebranches or 1d8+4 pleasure devils 1/day; caster level 20th. This ability is the equivalent of a 9th-level spell

Lilith is the second consort to Baalzebul. She is often regarded as the patron of black witches on the Material Plane.

Strategies and Tactics
Lilith has little to fear from mortal enemies, for her aura of desire can make slaves of even the most courageous of paladins. She likes to toy with her prey, assuming the form of loved ones she plucks from her victim's mind with telepathy. She uses her whip to leech her foes' strength until nothing but a heap of quivering flesh remains. Once helpless, she demands they renounce their faith and embrace her as their mistress, at which point she murders them, cackling as their souls reform as larvae before her smoldering eyes.

Servants, Enemies, and Goals
Lilith is a well-known figure in Hell, one occasionally painted as a romantic figure, a spurned lover or a wronged woman. On the Material Plane, witches, warlocks, evil druids, and other dabblers in the occult hold her in high regard. As well, she's quite beautiful and talented in the arts of passion, a fact she uses to ensure she survives the occasional upheaval that plagues her native plane.

Lilith has been near power for as long as Asmodeus has ruled the Nine Hells. The earliest records of Lilith recounts when Baalzebul gave her to Moloch as a gift in a transparent attempt to curry favor with the Lord of the Sixth. Lilith was easily the most alluring of fiends in the Hells and she has a way of distracting those who encounter her, keeping their attention diverted from what is truly important.

While serving Moloch in all things, a service she came to resent, she fought for her place against Malagarde, the treacherous night hag. If Lilith had been a little more eager in her duties, she might have exposed Malagarde's villainy and the Nine Hells would be a vastly different place than it is today.

After Moloch's fall, Lilith returned to Maladomini, relegated to a position of second consort in Baalzebul's court. Her resentment has grown, for she feels powerless and despises the archdevil's disgusting touch. For a time, she worked closely with Glasya and Tartach, but she opted not to go to Glasya's court, partly because of her resentment of Glasya's sudden rise, but also to stay close to Baalzebul's court and find some weakness. When she does, there's no doubt that she will make the bid for his position and replace the bloated slug as Maladomini's new master.

Lilith has a strong mortal following. If she would only cultivate her followers, she might rise even further in the esteem of her peers. Surely she would lure many mortals to the Nine Hells by dint of how she is perceived on the Material Plane. It is her disinterest in such matters that stands as her only barrier, and if she ever overcomes her detachment she could be a force to be reckoned with in the Hells.

Cultists of Lilith gain access to the Charm, Evil, and Law domains and can cast divine spells up to 5th level. Her favored weapon is the whip.

Hutijin

Wreathed in crackling lightning and born aloft on great leathery wings is this a dreadful fiend, a great monster with a savage head capped with curling sharp horns. Its rust red skin flashes with the electricity that caresses its flesh, bursting forth and seeking ground as the horror skims the ground, sweeping its path with a writhing trident filled with unholy might.

Hutijin CR 26
hp 486 (36 HD); regeneration 10; **DR** 15/epic and good

LE Huge Outsider (baatezu, evil, extraplanar, lawful)
Init +4; **Senses** see in darkness, *true seeing*; Listen +48, Spot +48
Aura despair (30 ft.)
Languages telepathy 100 ft., tongues

AC 46, touch 17, flat-footed 42 (-2 size, +4 Dex, +7 armor, +5 deflection, +22 natural)
Immune electricity, fire, poison
Resist acid 10 and cold 10; **SR** 39
Fort +29, **Ref** +24, **Will** +29

Speed 40 ft. (8 squares), fly 60 ft. (good); Flyby Attack
Melee+*3 bloodfeeding* (*MI*) *fleshgrinding* (*MI*) *keen trident* +50/+45/+40/+35 (3d6+15/19-20) or
Melee 2 claws +46 (1d8+12 plus 2d6 electricity) and bite +41 (2d6+6 plus 2d6 electricity) or
Melee+*3 bloodfeeding* (*MI*) *fleshgrinding* (*MI*) *keen trident* +48/+43/+38/+33 (3d6+15/19-20) and
Ranged+*5 binding* (*MI*) *net* +41 (special)
Space 15 ft.; **Reach** 15 ft.
Base Atk +36; **Grp** +56
Atk Options Brand of the Nine Hells (Mephistopheles) (*FC2*), Combat Brute (*CW*), Improved Bull Rush, Improved Sunder, Mark of Cania (*FC2*), Net and Trident (*CW*), Power Attack, Power Critical (trident), Shock Trooper (*CW*), electricity attack, aligned strike (evil, lawful), epic strike
Special Actions change shape, *summon baatezu*
Combat Gear*rod of rulership, scarab of invulnerability* (*MI*)
Spell-Like Abilities (CL 19th):
At will -- *blasphemy* (DC 25), *create undead*, *greater dispel magic*, *greater teleport* (self plus 50 lbs. objects only), *invisibility*, *limited wish* (fulfill another's wish only), *magic circle against good*, *mass hold monster* (DC 27), *power word kill*, *ray of enfeeblement* (ranged touch +38), *suggestion* (DC 21), *unholy aura* (DC 26), *wall of fire* (DC 18)
2/day -- *heal* (self only)
1/day -- *symbol of persuasion* (DC 24)

Abilities Str 34, Dex 19, Con 28, Int 21, Wis 28, Cha 26
Feats Brand of the Nine Hells (Mephistopheles) (*FC2*), Combat Brute (*CW*), Flyby Attack, Improved Critical (trident), Improved Bull Rush, Improved Sunder, Mark of Cania (*FC2*), Net and Trident (*CW*), Power Attack, Power Critical (trident) (*CW*), Shock Trooper (*CW*), Two-Weapon Fighting, Weapon Focus (trident)
Skills Appraise +44, Balance +45, Bluff +47, Concentration +48, Diplomacy +51, Disguise +8 (+10 acting), Intimidate +49, Jump +57, Knowledge (the planes) +44, Listen +48, Sense Motive +48, Spellcraft +44, Spot +48, Survival +9 (+11 on other planes), Tumble +45
Possessions combat gear plus *+3 bloodfeeding, fleshgrinding keen trident, +5 binding net, ring of protection +5, bracers of armor +7*

True Seeing (Su) As the true seeing spell, always active, caster level 20th.
Aura of Despair (Su) All creatures within 30 feet take a -4 penalty to all saving throws. Baatezu are immune to this ability.
Tongues (Ex) As the *tongues* spell, always active, caster level 20th.
Regeneration (Ex) Epic and good-aligned weapons and spells and spell-like effects with the good descriptor deal normal damage to Hutijen. If Hutijen loses a limb or body part, the lost portion regrows in 1 minute. Hutijen can reattach the severed member instantly by holding it to the stump.
Electricity Attack (Ex) Hutijen's natural attacks deal an extra 2d6 points of electricity damage.
Change Shape (Su) Hutijen can assume the form of any Small or Medium humanoid. He remains in one form until he chooses to assume a new one. Hutijen reverts to his natural form when killed. A *true seeing* spell reveals his natural form.
Summon Baatezu (Sp) 75% chance to summon 1d2 pit fiends 1/day; caster level 20th. This ability is the equivalent of a 9th-level spell.

Hutijin leads a gathering of pit fiends sworn to serve Mephistopheles.

Strategies and Tactics
Hutijin is ruthless in combat, especially so when confronting mortals. Although he relishes melee combat, he quickly establishes the tenor of the fight by taking to the air and unleashing a barrage of spell-like effects beginning with *mass hold person* and then *power word kill* to eliminate any spellcasters who managed to resist the first effect. He casts *unholy aura* followed by *symbol of persuasion* and then uses Flyby Attack to carve up those enemies still standing.

Servants, Enemies, and Goals
Hutijin is one the greatest of Hell's dukes for he has the loyalty of two full companies of pit fiends. These pit fiends make up Cania's aristocracy and through their support with Hutijin's guidance, Cania is safe from all but the most concerted attacks.

Outside of the Nine Hells, Hutijin is an obscure figure, shrouded in secrecy and unknown to all but the most learned of infernal scholars. The secrecy around this figure largely stems from Hutijin's hatred of mortals. Even before his descent, he despised the denizens of the Material Plane and viciously hunted them, capturing and torturing them for months before he finally crushed the life out of them. It is this monstrous tendency and lack of interest in mortal affairs that has relegated this duke of Cania to such obscurity, even if his status and power do not match his virtual anonymity.

Within the hierarchy of the Nine Hells, Hutijin is regarded as the quintessential duke and many archdevils have tried to lure him away from Mephistopheles. Hutijin is famously loyal and has always stood by his master, whom he regards as a near god and clearly the rightful ruler of the Nine Hells. With such a willing servant, many have wondered why Mephistopheles has never abused this trust, but one merely has to look to the pit fiends to explain why doing so could spell a sudden and final end to the Lord of the Eighth.

Adramalech

What at first appears to be a balding aged man with a gray beard reveals its infernal nature by the small crimson horns on his brow and the matching forked tail peeking out from beneath his flowing multicolored robes. A smile stretches across its wrinkled features and its cold wet eyes flare with some inner flame.

Adramalech CR 27
hp 400 (32 HD); regeneration 10; **DR** 15/epic and good

LE Medium Outsider (baatezu, evil, extraplanar, lawful)
Init +8; **Senses** see in darkness; Listen +44, Spot +44
Aura despair (30 ft.)
Aura fear (180 ft., DC 33)
Languages*tongues*; telepathy 100 ft.

AC 40, touch 18, flat-footed 32; Two-Weapon Defense (+8 Dex, +7 armor, +15 natural)
Immune fire and poison
Resist acid 10 and cold 10; **SR** 37
Fort +38, **Ref** +38, **Will** +39

Speed 40 ft. (8 squares)
Melee*Adramalech's staff* +42/+387+32/+27 (1d6+13 plus see text) or
Melee*Adramalech's staff* +40/+35/+30/+25 (1d6+10 plus see text) and *Adramalech's staff* +40/+35 (1d6+6 plus see text)
Base Atk +32; **Grp** +39
Atk Options aligned strike (evil, lawful), epic strike, speak unto the masses
Special Actions Mark of Nessus, Recitation of the Meditative State, *summon baatezu*
Combat Gear*ring of telekinesis*
Utterances Known (CL 20th)*:
Lexicon of the Evolving Mind
6th -- *greater knight's puissance, mystic rampart, singular mind*
5th -- *eldritch attraction, greater energy negation, preternatural clarity, sensory focus*
4th -- *confounding resistance, potent word of nurturing, spell rebirth, word of bolstering*
3rd -- *accelerated attack, energy negation, seek the sky, temporal spiral*
2nd -- *perceive the unseen, speed of the zephyr, strike of might*
1st -- *inertia surge, universal aptitude*
Lexicon of the Crafted Tool
5th -- *seize item*
4th -- *suppress item*
3rd -- *suppress weapon*
2nd -- *agitate metal*
1st -- *keen weapon*
Lexicon of the Perfected Map
4th -- *conjunctive gate*
3rd -- *thwart the traveler*
2nd -- *transform the landscape*
1st -- *shockwave*
**Tome of Magic*
Spell-Like Abilities (CL 19th):
At will -- *antimagic field*, *create greater undead*, *detect thoughts* (DC 19), *discern lies* (DC 21), *fireball* (DC 20), *greater dispel magic*, *greater teleport* (self plus 50 lb. objects only), *sending* (Asmodeus only), *wall of fire*
3/day -- *command* (DC 18, swift action)
1/day -- *meteor swarm* (DC 26), *symbol of insanity* (DC 25)

Abilities Str 25, Dex 26, Con 27, Int 36, Wis 29, Cha 24
Feats Brand of the Nine Hells (Asmodeus) (*FC2*), Improved Two-Weapon Fighting, Mark of Nessus (*FC2*), Obscure Personal Truename (*ToM*), Personal Truename Backlash (*ToM*), Quicken Utterance (*ToM*), Recitation of the Meditative State (*ToM*) (B), Skill Focus (Truespeak), Truename Rebuttal (*ToM*), Two-Weapon Defense, Two-Weapon Fighting
Skills Appraise +48, Bluff +42, Concentration +43, Decipher Script +48, Diplomacy +48, Disguise +7 (+9 acting), Forgery +48, Gather Information +42, Intimidate +44, Knowledge (arcana) +48, Knowledge (dungeoneering) +48, Knowledge (geography) +48, Knowledge (nobility) +48, Knowledge (religion) +48, Knowledge (the planes) +48, Listen +44, Search +48, Sense Motive +44, Spellcraft +50 (+52 deciphering scrolls), Spot +44, Survival +9 (+11 on other planes, +11 following tracks, +11 underground, +11 avoiding getting lost and hazards), Truespeak +61 (*ToM*), Use Magic Device +42 (+44 scrolls)
Possessions combat gear plus *Adramalech's staff, book of true binds, bracers of armor +7, cloak of resistance +5, greater amulet of the silver tongue* (*ToM*)

Aura of Fear (Su) At the end of each of Adramalech's turns, all creatures within 180 feet of him must make DC 33 Will saves or be panicked for 10 rounds. A creature that successfully saves cannot be affected again by Adramalech's aura for 24 hours. Baatezu are immune to the aura. The save DC is Charisma-based.
Tongues (Ex) As the *tongues* spell, always active, caster level 20th.

Regeneration (Ex) Epic and good-aligned weapons and spells and spell-like effects with the good descriptor deal normal damage to Adramalech. If Adramalech loses a limb or body part, the lost portion regrows in 1 minute. Adramalech can reattach the severed member instantly by holding it to the stump.
Dark Blessing (Su) Adramalech adds his Charisma modifier as a profane bonus to all saving throws.
Adramalech's Staff This item functions as a *+3/+3 quarterstaff*. In addition, as an immediate action, Adramalech can force a creature struck by the staff to succeed on a DC 34 Fortitude save or die. Even on a successful save, the victim takes 5d6 points of damage. Baatezu struck by the staff are disintegrated, as the *disintegrate* spell, if they fail the save. Adramalech may only use this ability once per hour and the item only functions this way when in Adramelech's hands. The save DC is Constitution-based.
Speak Unto the Masses (Su) Adramalech can affect multiple creatures of the same type with a single utterance. No two creatures to be affected can be more than 30 feet apart and the base DC for his Truespeak check is equal to the most powerful (highest CR or most Hit Dice, if affecting PCs) creature in the group. Each creature affected with the utterance beyond the first increases the Truespeak check DC by 2.
Summon Baatezu (Sp) 55% chance to summon 1d3 pit fiends or 50% chance to summon 1d6+2 malebranche; 1/day; caster level 20th. This ability is the equivalent of a 9th-level spell.

Adramalech is the Chancellor of the Nine Hells and closest advisor to Asmodeus.

Strategies and Tactics
Adramalech is a formidable opponent, being talented with the use of truename magic and capable of bringing to bear a potent array of utterances. The Chancellor always manipulates the terrain to his advantage using *transform the landscape* to crack and buckle the earth within 20 feet of himself, followed with a reversed *seek the sky* to eliminate flying foes. Thereafter, he protects himself with a *symbol of insanity* and hammers at his opponents with *meteor swarm* and *fireball*. Those that close with Adramalech must contend with his deadly quarterstaff, which he uses to great effect, slaying the first creature he hits. If reduced to 200 hit points or less, he summons a few pit fiends to even the odds and then beats a hasty retreat using *greater teleport*.

Servants, Enemies, and Goals
Adramalech descended into the Nine Hells with the rest of the devils, and though powerful in his own right, natural untrustworthiness and naked self-interest prompted the Lord of Nessus to keep this fiend lord close. Adamalech's story might have ended here, but this devil developed a flair for truenames and made every effort to learn the personal truenames of every rival, every enemy, and every ally in the Nine Hells, collecting them in a great tome known as *The Book of Fire*. He quickly outstripped those in better standing and convinced Asmodeus to raise him up to the position of Chancellor where he remains to this day.

Adramelech has many enemies in the Nine Hells, but his uncanny knowledge and position keep most of his foes at bay. Instead, his enemies besmirch his name, spreading rumors of how the Chancellor attends Asmodeus by being master of his wardrobe, though no one would dare insult the Chancellor to his face.

Adramelech makes a great show of being loyal to Asmodeus, but he regularly operates outside of his responsibilities, spying, issuing orders, and hiding things from the Overlord. As Adramalech seems to have no ambition to rise above his station, it's not clear why he betrays his master as readily as he does, nor is it clear why Asmodeus doesn't just school the Chancellor and bring him to heel. Whatever the reasons, Adramalech is a dangerous element in Nessus's court and one that visitors do well to avoid.

Adramalech has several small cults of mortal followers. In all cases, they are crude and bestial, giving all and everything to their uncaring master. Their most profane acts are the offerings of their young to the infernal duke, sacrificing them on great bloody altars that vomit clouds of ochre smoke when in contact with mortal flesh. Mortal cultists gain access to the Evil, Knowledge, and Law domains.

In the Nine Hells, Adramalech delights in torturing and mutilating humans and elves, and pays well to acquire new victims. Adramalech maintains extensive dungeons beneath Asmodeus's palace, where his personal minions devise new ways to excite their master with the screams of their victims.

About the Author

Robert J. Schwalb is a contract designer for Wizards of the Coast and has contributed to numerous sourcebooks including Tome of Magic, Players Handbook 2, Fiendish Codex 2, Complete Scoundrel, Drow of the Underdark, Monster Manual V, Exemplars of Evil, and Elder Evils. Robert rarely emerges from his Tennessee office these days, except when dragged away from his keyboard by his incredibly patient wife Stacee and his pride of fiendish werecats.

Shadow of Shothragot

The Price of Survival

by Robert J. Schwalb
art by Efrem Palacios
11/30/2007

Dragon Features Archive
Dragon 361

The Green Horn Adventuring Troupe challenged the Crater Ridge Mines and were found wanting. After their priest fell, the kuo-toans swarmed them, ruthless in their tactics and filled with religious fervor and unreasoning hatred. One by one, the heroes fell, the flesh of their bodies flung up in the orgy of violence, trailing ropes of dark blood to the sounds of their screams. It was too much for the ranger named Giorge, and he set aside his courage and fled into the black tunnels.

Cursing with every step, begging his feet to turn around so he might save his friends, his body denied him for the fear had a grip on his heart and there was no turning back. So he ran. He ran for what might have been minutes but felt like days and in his panic, he lost track of where he was, losing himself in the bleak corridors and the rusting rails of the accursed mines. When his breath came in hitches and the pain in his side forced him to stop, he collapsed, tears pouring from his eyes, little sobs escaping from his dry and cracked lips. He knew he would die. The sounds of his pursuers were close. Too close.

He drew his short sword, thumbing the edge of the blade as he fought for control over himself. He was about to stand -- to make his final desperate attempt to kill his foes -- when something wet and black and awful curled around his ankle. It jerked him into the cloying darkness of the mine's endless shadows before he even had a chance to scream.

While each book can stand on its own, *Exemplars of Evil* and *Elder Evils* are in fact companion products -- two sourcebooks constructed to provide Dungeon Masters with a foul assortment of dreadful villains to use against their player characters. By using the cast of unsavory characters presented in *Exemplars of Evil*, you can foreshadow the campaign-ending horrors of *Elder Evils*. This web enhancement, then, provides an interesting adversary and his minion, but it also foreshadows the coming of Shothragot, the Herald of Tharizdun, a powerful elder evil bent on releasing his own vile master.

Giorge Forsworn

"I'm so sorry ... sorry ... it hurts, doesn't it. I'm trying to make this quick. S ... s ... so sorry!"
-- Giorge Forsworn

Formerly a bold adventurer and member of the Green Horn Adventuring Troupe, Giorge Forsworn fell from grace and is now a

corrupted and insane villain, bent on spreading death and destruction in the blasphemous name of his despicable master. Forged anew by the filthy touch of the elder evil named Shothragot, violent images contaminate his mind and drive him to commit unspeakable acts of grisly murder. A disturbing villain, he prowls the lands in search of those he deems as marked for death and puts them to the sword.

Background
When the Green Hand Adventuring Troupe learned that the cult of the Elder Elemental Eye was once more active in the area, they stormed the Crater Ridge Mines, searching for a way to breach the crater's interior and besiege the temple itself. In spite of early successes, they move too swiftly and eventually found themselves overrun and slaughtered by kuo-toan cultists. One among them survived, though: a ranger named Giorge.

Fleeing through the tunnels, he eventually became lost and stumbled into a chamber containing a great abomination, a fragment of Tharizdun's personality severed at the time of his imprisonment. Giorge's sudden arrival and the approach of more fishfolk hunters caused the great horror to awaken and snatch Giorge, plunging the mortal into the thickened waters contaminated by its rot. Beneath the churning surface, the entity known as Shothragot infested Giorge's mind, rent his spirit, and seized his body, transforming it into something else entirely.

The elder evil awakened a trace of fiendish blood that lay dormant in the broken ranger, causing him to become a tiefling. The severe agony of transformation shattered Giorge's mind, and when he was spit out upon the shores, he gibbered like an idiot, shrieking and laughing by turns for days on end. But the thing in the pool was not through with his first disciple.

Shothragot swelled out from the pool's depths and instructed Giorge to go forth to spread the news of its coming, and also to find and destroy its enemies. The new champion had no choice but to agree since Shothragot possessed his soul. And so he went out into the world, scouring the lands through which he traveled for those he perceived as threats and for those marked by his god as being chosen to die. When he finds them, he does as he has been commanded. He kills.

Goals
The experience in the Crater Ridge Mines left Giorge Forsworn changed in body and mind. The physical changes, while profound, compared little to the evil filling the vessel of his soul. The entity in the shadowy cave filled his mind with disturbing visions of apocalypse and planted instructions that grew and thrived in the haunted corridors of his thoughts. Now when he draws close to an individual Shothragot deems a threat -- no matter how minor -- Giorge sees a fiery glyph burning on her brow. This sigil marks those Giorge must kill even though each murder pained him, reducing him to tears for he knew in his heart that what he did was wrong. But Giorge serves because nothing else is permitted to him -- nothing beyond furthering his master's ambitions, and no doubt -- no hesitation -- will ever stop him from fulfilling his profane duty.

Using Giorge Forsworn
Giorge Forsworn is insane. He is a villain in his own right, but he is also a servant of an elder evil. Shothragot has a penchant for remaking mortals into useful servants, bending their bodies and minds to become fitting tools for use in its own agenda of freeing Tharizdun. Giorge, then, is an extension of the elder evil's will. He travels endlessly, moving through the lands, always watching and searching for those marked for death. He is a reluctant servant, haunted by the memories of his life before the touch of evil, and he despairs about his fate. Even the company of a beautiful nymph is not enough to drag him from his melancholic thoughts, though she uses every trick she can to distract him from his suffering.

Regardless of his detestation for his work, he cannot stop himself. He must do as his master commands and he has no concept of sparing his victims. Therefore, in spite of his reluctance, Giorge is a foul adversary that strikes seemingly at random. In one village, he might slaughter an entire family of peasants, and in the next, he may burn down a temple of St. Cuthbert. Even he has no idea why his targets are selected. He only knows that they are.

Forsworn in Faerûn
Shothragot fled into the Plane of Shadow after Tharizdun's imprisonment and crawled through inky depths until it slipped free to emerge into the Material Plane of the Forgotten Realms only to become imprisoned in Undermountain by Halaster. Giorge Forsworn discovered the entity while exploring the immense dungeon in the aftermath the Mad Mage's death (see Expedition to Undermountain). Knowing the seals confining Tharizdun are too great in the Material Plane in which he is imprisoned, Shothragot intends to burrow a hole through reality so his master can tear free into Faerûn's cosmology.

Forsworn in Eberron
The Green Horn Adventuring Party was destroyed in the Khyber beneath Sharn, and Giorge stumbled into an ancient temple that contained the essence of a powerful daelkyr. Releasing the abomination in a botched attempt to hide from his pursuers, Giorge saw the entity tear free and then was remade by it into a brutal killing machine. As the entity builds its power in the dark tunnels, it sends Giorge to Sharn to retrieve victims for sacrifice or for remaking -- as the entity capriciously decides.

Description
Giorge stands just under 6 feet tall. He has a muscular frame and chiseled features, and from afar, he might even pass for human. Anything more than a glance reveals the truth of his blood, for his skin is deep blue mottled with purple spots and strange whorls of scarred flesh. In the palm of each hand snarls a wet and dripping mouth, while a nest of writhing tentacles ending in pink tongues lashes out from his navel.

He conceals his monstrous appearance beneath a suit of purple full plate emblazoned with the same symbols decorating his body. His helmet is a terrifying thing, wrought to resemble the fusion of countless faces twisted with agony, the flesh of one spilling into another. So lifelike are the visages, they seem to move, crying out for mercy, even as Giorge sets to complete his grisly task.

Giorge Forsworn CR 13
hp 120 (13 HD)

Male tiefling ranger 3/paladin of slaughter 4[*UA*]/mortal hunter 6[*BV*]
CE Medium outsider (native)
Init +5; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +10, Spot +10
Aura debilitating (10 ft.)
Languages Common, Draconic, Infernal

AC 24, touch 12, flat-footed 23; (+1 Dex, +9 armor, +3 shield, +1 deflection)
Immune disease, mind-affecting effects
Resist cold 5, electricity 5, fire 5
Fort +21, **Ref** +12, **Will** +11; +2 against spells and spell-like effects used by mortals

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Speed 20 ft. in full plate (4 squares), base speed 30 ft.
Melee *+1 unholy surge longsword*[*MIC*] +19/+14/+9 (1d8+5 plus 1 vile/19-20) or
Melee *+1 unholy surge longsword*[*MIC*] +15/+10/+5 (1d8+5 plus 1 vile/19-20) and
Melee *+1 bashing heavy steel shield* +12 (1d6+2)
Ranged *+1 composite longbow (Str +4)* +15/+10/+5 (1d8+5/[ts]3)
Base Atk +13; **Grp** +17
Atk Options deadly touch 16 points, favored enemy (humans) +2, mortal hunting +3, smite good 1/day (+4 attack, +4 damage), smite mortal 1/day (+2 attack, +12 damage)
Special Actions detect mortals, mortal skin (any nondragon), rebuke undead 7/day (+4, 2d6+5, 1st)
Combat Gear *least crystal of lifedrinking*[MIC], *potion of cure moderate wounds*
Mortal Hunter Spells Known (CL 6th):
3rd (2/day) -- *flesh ripper*[*BV*], *mirror sending*[*BV*], *nondetection*, *scrying* (DC 17), *suggestion* (DC 17), *vile lance*[*BV*], *wrack* (DC 17)[*SC*]
2nd (2/day) -- *detect thoughts* (DC 16), *evil eye* (DC 16)[*BV*], *hold person* (DC 16), *magic circle against good*, *see invisibility*, *web* (DC 16), *wither limb* (DC 16)[*SC*]
1st (2/day) -- *cause fear* (DC 15), *charm person* (DC 15), *detect good*, *heartache* (DC 15)[*BV*], *protection from good*, *sleep* (DC 15), *unnerving gaze* (DC 15)[*BV*]

Spell-Like Abilities (CL 25th):
At will -- *detect good* (CL 4th)
1/day -- *darkness*

Abilities Str 18, Dex 12, Con 18, Int 12, Wis 15, Cha 18
SQ divine grace, divine health, overwhelming aura of evil, spurn mortal magic, wild empathy +6 (+2 magical beasts)
Feats Alertness[B], Boost Spell-Like Ability[B, *BV*], Deformity (Madness)[*EIE*], Endurance[B], Improved Initiative, Insane Defiance[*EIE*], Mortalbane[*BV*], Track[B], Two-Weapon Fighting[B], Vile Martial Strike (longsword)[B, *BV*], Weapon Focus (longsword), Willing Deformity[B, *BV*]
Skills Bluff +10, Climb +4, Diplomacy +8, Heal +5, Hide +7, Intimidate +12, Jump -2, Knowledge (nature) +3, Knowledge (religion) +2, Listen +10, Move Silently +7, Search +7, Sense Motive +8, Spot +10, Survival +8 (+10 when following tracks), Tumble +0
Possessions combat gear plus *+1 blurring full plate, +1 bashing heavy steel shield, +1 unholy surge longsword, +1 composite longbow (Strength +4)* with 20 arrows, *ring of protection +1, cloak of Charisma +2, gauntlets of ogre power, vest of resistance +1*, finely wrought and polished silver mirror (1,000 gp focus for *mirror sending* and *scrying*), three pinches of diamond dust (50 gp each for *nondetection*)

Debilitating Aura (Su) All enemies within 10 feet of Giorge take a -1 penalty to Armor Class.

Deadly Touch (Su) Giorge can cause wounds with a successful touch. Each day, he can deal 16 points of damage. An opponent subjected to this attack halves this damage with a successful DC 16 Will save. Alternatively, Giorge can use any or all of this power to cure damage to undead creatures, just as an inflict wounds spell does. This ability otherwise functions identically to the paladin's lay on hands ability.

Mortal Hunting (Ex) This ability functions like the ranger's favored class ability except that it applies to all creatures other than constructs, fey, outsiders, and undead. The bonuses from this ability stack with Giorge's favored enemy bonus.

Smite Mortal (Su) Once per day, Giorge may make a special melee attack as a standard action. Against a mortal (see mortal hunting, above), he gains a +2 bonus on the attack roll and +12 points of damage on the weapon damage roll. If Giorge accidentally uses this ability against a nonmortal, the smite had no effect but is still used up for the day.

Detect Mortals (Su) As the *detect undead* spell, except it detects mortals (see mortal hunting), at will, caster level 15th.

Mortal Skin (Su) As the *polymorph* spell except Giorge may affect only himself and cannot assume the form of a mortal of the dragon type.

Hook Weeps and wails in combat.

Mask

"She is my rock, my foundation, and I cling to her as I travel the bleak roads of my destiny."
-- Giorge Forsworn

Mask is a corrupted nymph, a fey warped by the filthy embrace of Shothragot and given to Giorge as a helper, lover, and slave. She aids the Forsworn by locating his victims, but more importantly, she goads him to more and more acts of appalling violence. Her intoxicating beauty and her hold over his heart threaten to kill the last vestiges of his humanity.

Background
Upon remaking Giorge Forsworn, Shothragot spread its malign influence through the land, sliding down the rocky slopes of the Crater Ridge and infesting the forests, corrupting the waters, and warping the sylvan denizens in the surrounding environs. One of the first creatures bent to its will was a young nymph. When it found her, Shothragot filled her with unspeakable essence of its filth until she too became a creature of wickedness, joining the others who were in the thing's thrall.

The elder evil then gave the nymph to Giorge Forsworn as a tool and gift to reward his mortal hunter for his constant service. Secretly, though, Shothragot suspected a part of his champion clung to his mortality and so it used Mask to ensure Giorge would not abandon Shothragot's purpose.

Goals
Outrage fills Mask. Her contamination leaves her a wretched thing and she expresses her wickedness with incomparable cruelty. Her principal objective is to ensure Giorge remains true to Shothragot and continues his work to murder anyone who would rise against Shothragot as the evil struggles to reunite with his divine form. However, while attending to Giorge, she takes every opportunity to kill and maim, adding to the horror Giorge creates as he goes about his bloody business. Though she cannot conceive of turning her hatred against the Forsworn or some other minion of the elder evil, the rage still holds her heart. Thus, she unleashes her anger on innocents, delighting as her woody claws rend their flesh, savoring the delicate morsels as she dissects them alive, while they writhe in the exquisite ecstasy of her uncanny beauty.

Using Mask
Mask is a horrific minion -- a monstrous villain every bit as twisted and evil as Giorge Forsworn. She is obedient to the tiefling, but bends his instructions to give her the greatest freedom to harm and torment those she encounters. She accompanies Giorge on his missions, supporting him with her blinding beauty and stunning glance, as well as with spells and the supernatural abilities she acquires from her filthy pacts with vile vestiges.

Although Mask has a wide range of combat capabilities, her true strengths rest on her ability as a spy. Many of her capabilities are suited for information gathering, and thus she spends much of her time watching for her lover.

Description
The transformation left Mask's physical beauty largely intact, but destroyed her soul. She possesses a sleek body, alluring and athletic, and black hair tumbles down from her head. Beneath a queer mask, one can see brilliant blue eyes that flash with incredible power. A long, black cloak hangs from her shoulders providing some covering for her scantily clad body. The only unsettling thing about her physical form is that she has bundles of animated twigs, twisting and clawing, where her hands ought to be. Although monstrous in appearance, these claws retain the flexibility and use of normal hands.

Mask CR 11
hp 52 (9 HD); fast healing 4; DR 10/cold iron and magic

Female corrupted nymph binder 3[*ToM*]
CE Medium fey
Init +4; **Senses** low-light vision; Listen +12, Spot +12
Aura blinding beauty (30 ft., DC 25)
Languages Abyssal, Aquan, Auran, Common, Draconic, Infernal, Sylvan

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AC 29, touch 21, flat-footed 25; Dodge (+4 Dex, +7 deflection, +1 insight, +4 natural)
Fort +18, **Ref** +21, **Will** +22

Speed 30 ft. (6 squares), swim 20 ft.
Melee 2 claws +9 (1d6+2 plus 4 vile)
Base Atk +5; **Grp** +7
Atk Options disruptive attack (4 vile), sudden strike +1d6
Special Actions bird's eye viewing, invisibility, soul binding (Malphas), stunning glance
Combat Gear *brooch of avoidance*[*MIC*], *pearl of brain lock*[*MIC*], *rod of grievous wounds*[*MIC*]
Druid Spells Prepared (CL 7th):
4th -- *scrying* (DC 17)
3rd -- *cure moderate wounds*, *hypothermia* (DC 16)[SC], *infestation of maggots* (melee touch +7, DC 16)[*SC*]
2nd -- *bear's endurance*, *heat metal* (DC 15), *owl's wisdom*, *tree shape*
1st -- *babau slime*[SC], *claws of the bear*[*SC*], *entangle* (DC 14), *snake's swiftness*[*SC*], *thunderhead* (DC 14)[*SC*]
0 -- *detect magic*, *flare* (DC 13), *guidance*, *know direction*, *light*, *resistance*
Spell-Like Abilities (CL 7th):
1/day -- *dimension door*

Abilities Str 14, Dex 19, Con 14, Int 20, Wis 16, Cha 24

SQ pact augmentation (+1 insight to AC), poison use, suppress sign, wild empathy +20 (+16 magical beasts)
Feats Combat Casting, Dodge, Extend Supernatural Ability[*TM*], Weapon Finesse
Skills Bluff +18, Concentration +14 (+18 cast on the defensive), Decipher Script +8, Diplomacy +11, Disguise +7 (+9 acting), Escape Artist +13, Handle Animal +16, Heal +12, Hide +13, Intimidate +12, Knowledge (arcana) +8, Listen +12, Move Silently +13, Ride +6, Sense Motive +15, Spot +12, Use Rope +4 (+6 bindings)
Possessions combat gear plus *cloak of Charisma +2, gloves of Dexterity +2, implements of binding +2*[*ToM*], *mask of lies*[*MIC*]

Blinding Beauty (Su) At the start of each of Mask's turns, all humanoids within 30 feet that are looking directly at her must succeed on DC 25 Will saves or be blinded permanently as though by the *blindness/deafness* spell. Mask can suppress or resume this ability as a free action. The save DC Is Charisma-based and includes a +4 bonus from the enhanced power ability.

Disruptive Attack (Su) Mask deals 4 points of vile damage whenever she touches an uncorrupted, living, corporeal outsider.

Sudden Strike (Su) Mask deals an extra 1d6 points of damage on a successful melee attack made against a creature denied its Dexterity bonus to Armor Class. This extra damage also applies on ranged attacks against targets within 30 feet.

Bird's Eye Viewing (Su) At will, Mask can cause a raven to appear on her shoulder. She has complete control over the raven and can see what it sees and hear what it hears. She uses the bird's skill checks to determine the results of its actions and observations, but her own skill bonuses to derive information from its observation. The bird remains until she summons another, mentally dismisses it (a standard action), or stops binding with Malphas.

Invisibility (Su) As a full-round action, Mask can make herself invisible (as with the *invisibility* spell). The effect lasts until she attack or 3 rounds. Once she becomes visible, she must wait 5 rounds before she can use this ability again.

Stunning Glance (Su) As a standard action, Mask can stun a creature within 30 feet for 2d4 rounds. A DC 25 Will save negates this effect.

Suppress Sign (Ex) If Mask makes a good pact, she can suppress or reveal the vestige's sign at will as a swift action.

Hook She looses a horrific keening noise in combat.

About the Author

Robert J. Schwalb is a contract designer for Wizards of the Coast and has contributed to numerous sourcebooks including *Tome of Magic, Players Handbook 2, Fiendish Codex 2, Complete Scoundrel, Drow of the Underdark, Monster Manual V, Exemplars of Evil,* and *Elder Evils*. Robert rarely emerges from his Tennessee office these days, except when dragged away from his keyboard by his incredibly patient wife Stacee and his pride of fiendish werecats.

The Allure of Evil

Dark Churches

by Jason H. Haley
art by Ralph Horsley
11/12/2007

Dragon Features Archive
Dragon 361

Five dark churches are briefly outlined in the *Complete Champion*, and now you can learn more about the structure, duties, and benefits of each one. Because these affiliations explore the neutral and lawful/chaotic axis of the churches, player characters who aren't evil-aligned may want to consider gaining access to one of these churches.

ERYTHNUL: THE TEMPLE OF CARNAGE

Seasoned veterans often speak of the chaos inherent with battle. To followers of Erythnul, this chaos is their sacred charge. The battlefield is their temple; the screams of the dying are their hymns and the blood of their victims is the sacrament. Minor sects and cults form from time to time, but few are long-lived. At the heart of the fear and chaos spread by the followers of Erythnul, you may sense a dark and gory unity. Erythnul is called "the many" for good reason.

True to the nature of Erythnul, multiple sects and factions exist. They form alliances almost as often as they oppose each other. In uncivilized lands, the followers of Erythnul are typically chaotic evil and engage in slaughter for the sake of slaughter. They believe the blood of their victims fuels the strength of Erythnul and drives their god to greater heights of slaughter and violence.

However, in civilized lands, the presence of these battle-mad murderers and sadists are often less overt. They have scraped out corners in the back alleys and slums of many major cities. At the heart, this nebulous organization is referred to as "The Temple of Carnage." The followers of this organization are predominantly chaotic evil, but not exclusively so. Chaotic neutral individuals, while rare, are not without precedent.

What drives these followers is a clarity derived from a sense of purpose. The ideology of testing and proving their strength through battle -- by living and dying by the sword -- is only part of it. What separates civilized followers of Erythnul from the rest is their view on slaughter: Killing the weak proves nothing and nothing is gained from it. They seek out those who are worthy of being sacrificed to Erythnul. Slaughter for the sake of slaughter is meaningless; the deaths derived from such a practice bring no power to Erythnul. In fact, these followers believe that unworthy sacrifices anger Erythnul and invite his wrath.

In the minds of the more civilized followers of Erythnul, a worthy individual is usually (but not always) a powerful and skilled warrior of

one sort or another. Good or evil is irrelevant in the eyes of the Temple of Carnage. Spilling their blood is what lends the strength of their foes to Erythnul. Noncombatants and lesser foes are often beneath their notice -- such individuals do not deserve a warrior's death and are often ignored so long as they do not interfere. This view causes both evil and non-evil members of the Temple of Carnage to seek out greater challenges. Powerful beings and organizations draw these followers like moths to a flame.

Prospective members are recruited from all lots of life. Typically those most sought out are warriors, berserkers, rogues, assassins, and adventurers. Initiation varies from sect to sect, but one of the most common practices is to take the prospective initiate into battle and abandon her at a critical moment. Those who survive are welcomed into the ranks and encouraged to seek out those worthy of death. Alternatively, an individual who kills an existing member of the Temple of Carnage and displays all the desirable traits may be recruited.

Enemies and Allies: Any lawful-aligned organization is likely to oppose the followers of Erythnul. Outside of that, anyone or anything that stands in the path of the Temple of Carnage is something to be killed or destroyed. Allies are rare -- factions ally themselves with others for the sake of convenience. Ultimately, everyone is expendable in the eyes of these followers.

Members: Members of the Temple of Carnage can be found in almost any lands, civilized or otherwise. The vast majority of the followers tend to be humanoids (goblinoids, ogres, trolls, and the like), with little diversity within a particular group. Strength and ruthlessness are the only real prerequisites.

Scale: 12 (multiregional).

Affiliation Score Criteria: Any skilled combatant who survives initiation can gain favor within the Temple of Carnage. However, an individual must be chaotically aligned in order to gain favor. Lawful individuals cannot fully embrace the ideology of the Temple of Carnage.

	Affiliation Score
Criterion	**Modifier**
One-Time	
Character level	+1/2 levels
Barbarian or rogue	+1
Knowledge (religion) 5 or more ranks	+1
Base attack bonus +5 or higher	+1
Proficient with two or more exotic weapons	+1
Multiple Use	
Abandons an inferior ally	+1
Survives a battle against difficult odds (at least three to one)	+2
Converts a new member	+2
Kills more than one opponent in melee combat in a single round	+1/4 creature's CR (after the first)
Single-handedly kills a superior opponent (1 or more levels higher than the follower)	+1/2 opponent's CR
Destroys a powerful holy or magic item	+1/1,000 gp in value
Survives a battle against impossible odds (at least five to one)	+4
Destroys a lawful aligned temple/fellowship	+8
Fails in combat	-2
Performs overtly good act	-4
Fails to kill a wounded opponent (50% or less health)	-4
Associates with known lawful creatures (such as monks or paladins)	-4
Flees from battle	-10

Titles, Benefits, and Duties: To gain a new rank and its associated benefit, you must designate a target that is your equal in combat and kill it within 24 hours. This target must be a combatant with an Intelligence score of at least 3 and be a sacrifice worthy of Erythnul.

Affiliation

Rank	Score	Title: Benefits and Duties
0	3 or lower	None
1	4-12	**Raider:** Gain a +1 bonus on damage rolls when in combat.
2	13-18	**Marauder:** Once per day, when fighting multiple opponents, re-roll an attack that misses.
3	19-29	**Reaver:** Once per day when killing an opponent of equal or greater level, all opponents within 20 feet who witness the killing are shaken for a number of rounds equal to your Strength modifier. Will save to negate this effect: 10 +1/2 base attack bonus + Str modifier.
4	30 or higher	**Incarnate:** If hit points are reduced to 0 or less from a physical attack, make a Fortitude save equal to 10 + damage received. If successful, you do not suffer the effects of damage and can continue fighting for a number of rounds equal to your Constitution modifier (minimum of 1 round). You continue to take damage normally, and at the end of that duration, you die if your hit points are still at -10 or below.

SPECIFIC ROLEPLAYING APPLICATIONS

Favored Feats: Followers of Erythnul prefer feats that enhance their ability to slaughter their foes. Power Attack is a common one, as is any feat that enhances their skill with weapons. Warriors and berserkers that worship the Temple of Carnage particularly favor Cleave and Great Cleave, which allows them to strike down more souls in the name of their bloodthirsty lord.

Favored Combat Tactics: The Temple of Carnage draws the most ruthless and battle-driven combatants into its fold. Odds and numbers are utterly meaningless to them. Only victory matters: conquer, kill, maim, and plunder. They favor large weapons capable of inflicting terrible wounds. Many followers have several levels of barbarian, fighter, or rogue, depending on how they prefer to carry out their own methods of slaughter.

Their own lives are brief and violent, and the only glory gained is by how many precede them into death. The followers of this bloody god usually prefer to overrun their enemy, using the sheer brutality of their assault to scatter their victims. Leaders and commanders on the battlefield are their favored targets since their deaths often create dissension. Many seize the head of a freshly slain enemy and hold it aloft while fighting in order to further rattle their opponents.

Favored Adventure Types: Wherever there is conflict, you will find followers of this faith. Members of the Temple of Carnage are drawn to places of battle. They actively seek out violent battles and conflicts where they can. They continually seek out those who prove themselves to be worthy adversaries (skilled in combat) and try to destroy them. Powerful champions may be humiliated and harassed long before they are killed, while lesser ones are often slaughtered in a particularly gruesome fashion in order to create fear and dissension in the ranks.

Favored Oaths: Most followers of Erythnul are incoherent in the height of their battle lust. However, those with a little more self control often shout taunts or epithets at their opponents: "Rush to your death, and glory!" or "Cowards bring no glory!" are common oaths. "You were hardly worth killing!" is a common taunt, as is: "Is this your best?"

GRUUMSH: THE FURY OF THE EYE

Crush the weak. Break their bones, rend their flesh, and let their blood pour across the land. Strength lies in victory. Burn the forests and let the stone halls of the mountains echo with the screams of the dying. The orc warlords lay claim to all that falls under the watchful eye of He-Who-Never-Sleeps as is their right and destiny. All others are born only to be slaughtered or enslaved. The weak will be destroyed; all others serve only to test their mettle so that they may find glory under the One-Eye.

The most devout followers of Gruumsh form a cabal known as the Fury of the Eye. This is the most zealous and ruthless (and consequently the largest) religious movement within the orc tribes. They are the driving force behind the hordes and continually seek out ways to reclaim their rightful glory. In most cases this means the utter annihilation of those who oppose them. However, neutral-aligned groups within this sect take a more utilitarian approach: The weak exist to be oppressed and serve the strong. Life under orc rule is harsh, and slavery is usually only a brief reprieve from death.

Non-evil members are a bit more tolerant than their brethren. They do not actively seek to kill or subjugate non-orcs, and even dwarves or elves may be viewed neutrally so long as they are not automatically hostile toward the followers of Gruumsh. They are however, exceedingly competitive and go to great lengths to prove orc superiority at every turn. This can vary widely from simple contests of strength and skill to proficiency at arms and in combat. All members of this fellowship take great pride in demonstrating their superiority, and they count kills and captures in battles so that they can boast of their prowess.

In their own lands, the Fury of the Eye holds sway over the tribal leaders of the orc clans. They actively push the warlords toward greater conquest, while at the same time encouraging promising champions to carve out their own bloody paths in the name of the One-Eye. This not-so-subtle manipulation culls the weak from their ranks, which ultimately serves both the intent and purpose of their god.

Outside orc tribal lands, half-orcs and other humanoids are often used to carry out the will of Gruumsh. They have the distinct advantage of being able to move more freely within civilized lands and act as the eyes and ears of the Fury of the Eye beyond orc borders. Given time, they may view their fellow adventurers as a sort of surrogate tribe and show the same fierce loyalty to their comrades as they would their own blood.

Initiation into the Fury of the Eye varies by tribe. Common initiations include acts of sacrifice to the One-Eye or the capture and enslavement of particularly hated enemies. One extreme ritual involves the voluntary self impalement with a spear symbolic of Gruumsh's suffering at the hands of his enemies. If the supplicant survives the ordeal (typically a day or more) without aid, he is tentatively accepted into the fold. Members are continually called upon to demonstrate their devotion to the One-Eyed god in various manners.

Enemies and Allies: The relentless orc hordes rarely count other races among their allies. They swear to crush the followers of Moradin and Corellon Larethian, whom they hate above all else. Any alliances made outside the orc clans and tribes are usually a means to an end.

Members: Members of the Fury of the Eye are typically orcs and their kin, but half-orcs are tolerated in the neutral-aligned sects. Non-orc affiliates are rare, but not entirely unheard of. Half-orcs and especially non-orcs are typically not held in high regard as full-blooded kin. However, regardless of race, first and foremost is the will of Gruumsh.

Scale: 12 (multiregional).

Affiliation Score Criteria: Orcs and half-orcs are preferred by the members of the Fury of the Eye. However, non-orc individuals can distinguish themselves through individual acts of devotion.

	Affiliation Score
Criterion	**Modifier**
One-Time	
Character level	+1/2 levels
Barbarian or fighter	+1
Full-blooded orc	+1
Non-orc or half-orc	-1
Chaotic alignment	+1
Knowledge (religion) 5 or more ranks	+1
Strength 18+	+1
Kill an enemy with a single blow (within 3 levels of yours)	+1
Base attack bonus +5 or higher	+1
Multiple Use	
Kills more than one opponent in melee combat in a single round	+1/4 creature's CR (after the first)
Subdues/captures more than one opponent in a battle	+1 per opponent (after the first)
Single-handedly kills a superior opponent (1 or more levels higher than the follower)	+1/2 opponent's CR
Kills the most enemies in a battle with an EL equal to your current level +2	+1
Defeating a higher-level elf or dwarf	1 + 1/2 opponent's CR
Destroys an elven enclave/dwarven stronghold	+4
Destroys a temple dedicated to Corellon Larethian or Moradin	+8
Fails in combat	-2
Fails to kill a wounded opponent (50% or less health)	-4
Associates with known enemies (such as dwarves or elves)	-4
Flees from battle	-10

Titles, Benefits, and Duties: To gain a new rank and its associated benefit, a member of the Fury of the Eye must contend with his peers, dueling one after the other without aid or rest until they are unable to continue. To be considered for the next rank, they must defeat 1 + the number of peers equal to the next highest rank. Example: A rank 1 member (fodder) of the Fury of the Eye must defeat at least two of his peers in order to be considered for the next rank (foe bane).

	Affiliation	
Rank	**Score**	**Title: Benefits and Duties**
0	3 or lower	None
1	4-12	**Fodder:** Gains +2 bonus on damage rolls when fighting adjacent to two or more allies.
2	13-18	**Foe Bane:** Gains +5 bonus on damage rolls on attacks of opportunity against dwarves and elves.
3	19-29	**First Spear:** Once per day, gain the ability to rage as a barbarian of half your character level.
4	30 or higher	**Warlord:** All allies within 30 feet gain a +4 morale bonus on saves against fear effects, and a +1 morale bonus on attack rolls.

SPECIFIC ROLEPLAYING APPLICATIONS

Favored Feats: To the blood-crazed warriors of Gruumsh, brute force rules the battlefield. As a result, the ability to move swiftly and strike decisively in combat is extremely prized. Mobility and Combat Reflexes are common choices, allowing them to pick and choose their targets and strike at a moments notice. Most warriors favor heavy weapons and prefer Weapon Focus and Power Attack to crush their opponents.

Favored Combat Tactics: Orcs are canny fighters, and while the brutish warriors may seek glory in battle, the warlords make their plans. They fight with the relentless fury of a mob. Each one knows that even if they fall, a dozen others will swarm to take their place. However, this is tempered by the fierce desire to bring as much glory and honor to themselves as well as to their god, so while zealously fearless, they are not foolish.

Followers of Gruumsh consider it a high mark of honor to capture particularly powerful opponents. Lesser captives invariably become slaves (though even this is often brief), while powerful foes are sacrificed to Gruumsh in dark and bloody rituals. Dismemberment and decapitation are the most common and favored methods.

Favored Adventure Types: Smaller clans and younger warriors frequently venture out on skirmishes and raids to harass outlying villages. Any incursion into orc lands (or those the orcs believe is rightfully theirs) is a likely target. Elf and dwarf outposts are always favored targets, but any non-orc is fair game. Particularly powerful monstrous humanoids sometimes are approached on neutral terms for a mutual objective. Ultimately, however, they are used as little more than fodder in battle and are targeted just as viciously if they do not agree to ally with the bloodthirsty orcs.

Favored Oaths: "Gruumsh sees only victory!" and "Blood for the One-Eye!" are common oaths. "By his bloody spear!" is another frequently shouted epithet.

HEXTOR: THE FIST OF TYRANNY

Strength of law is meaningless without the will to enforce it. Slaves do not question their master. They do not contemplate the meaning of their existence or the will of their master. They simply execute their master's will. Hesitation invariably leads to disaster. Insubordination is tantamount to anarchy. Such weakness is not tolerated.

The Fist of Tyranny is an elitist cabal among the ranks of the followers of Hextor. They maintain a rigid military hierarchy that tolerates no form of dissent or insubordination. Lesser members are subservient to their superiors. While treachery is discouraged, incompetence or failure of leadership is rarely tolerated. Punishment

is always meted with swift and decisive finality. It is quite common for individuals to move up in the ranks through the demise of a superior.

Churches dedicated to Hextor exist throughout civilized lands. Many double as military fortresses and bastions. They tend to operate openly, working within the laws of the land to their advantage. Cities and villages occupied by followers of Hextor tend to be very lawful; insurrection, corruption, and insurgency are not tolerated. Any occurrence or presence of criminal activity is dealt with publicly in a swift and decisive manner.

This rule of law is what many find particularly appealing. While oppressive at times, everyone is equal under the law. There are no exceptions in this -- the law is absolute. Everyone is assured justice regardless of wealth, influence, and affiliation. The same iron hand that enforces the rule of law protects the citizenry from harm and corruption. Those who put aside their bias and fully embrace and endorse order flourish under the mantle of the Fist of Tyranny.

Non-evil followers embrace the security and order provided by the Fist of Tyranny. They thrive under the social, military, and religious hierarchy provided by the order where everyone has a place and purpose. They are pragmatic enough to understand that others may disagree with their methods, but have conviction that the ends justify the means. For them education is preferred over subjugation. They use reason where reason rules, and force when all reasonable methods have failed. However, they are no less thorough in their use of force when they decide they have no other alternative.

This pragmatic view is the foundation for their beliefs under the Fist of Tyranny and extends to matters that most non-evil races find distasteful -- particularly slavery. Non-evil followers view slavery as a necessary evil and the cornerstone of civilization. Those who have been subjugated were in need of purpose and guidance. Typically, non-evil members do not actively seek out to enslave individuals, but they do see slaves as property, much the same way a horse is: They provide a service and must be cared for accordingly. However, they are still subordinate and must obey the will of their master.

True to the will of Hextor, these militant sects seek to instill order upon whatever populace they dominate. When not ruling over a subjugated populace, the order actively looks for conflicts abroad to hone their military might. While any scale of engagement will suit them, the followers of Hextor search for ways and means to oppose those devoted to Heironeous. They view the benevolence of Heironeous and his followers as folly; the weakness of Heironeous's followers allows dissent and corruption to take root. This leads to the breakdown of civilization and is tantamount to chaos.

Conscripts are frequently selected from among the ranks of existing militias dedicated to Hextor. The indoctrination process is typically a brutal military regime that lasts up to a year. Out of the dozens who go through this training, only a few are actually prospective conscripts. The rest are fodder. Those among the fodder who survive form the cohort that the prospective conscript first leads in Hextor's name. Alternatively, individuals of particular skill at arms or leadership ability may be recruited into the fold. These champions are selected not only for their martial abilities and mastery of tactics, but their unquestioning loyalty to Hextor and their dedication to instilling, preserving, and enforcing order and discipline also help decide whether the champions are selected.

Enemies and Allies: While many oppose the tyrannical and ruthless ideology of Hextor and his followers, the forces they command are recognized for their competence and discipline. Many kingdoms have called upon the legions of Hextor in the past, usually out of desperation. The price of their service is often high: Usually it comes in the form of land grants and permission to operate freely within a kingdom. Heironeous and his followers represent the only complete opposition to Hextor and the Fist of Tyranny.

Members: Followers of Hextor are found primarily in civilized lands where organized warfare is prevalent. Bastions and smaller fortifications exist in savage lands, where they attempt to instill order on the indigenous population. Race is irrelevant to the Fist of Tyranny as long as all obey without question.

Scale: 15 (continental).

Affiliation Score Criteria: Members of the Fist of Tyranny find themselves constantly called upon to demonstrate their loyalty to the cause. They are expected to answer the call to arms at a moment's notice and obey orders received without question. Additionally, members are encouraged to seek out and recruit warriors to enlist in fighting under Hextor's banner. All members of this order must be lawfully aligned.

	Affiliation Score
Criterion	**Modifier**
One-Time	
Character level	+1/2 levels
Knowledge (religion) 5 or more ranks	+1
Ex-paladin	+1
Ex-paladin of Heironeous	+2
Base attack bonus +5 to +9	+1
Base attack bonus +10 or higher	+2

Proficient with all martial weapons	+1
Base attack bonus +4 or lower	-3
Multiple Use	
Converts a new member	+1
Instrumental in gaining control of a small community (thorpe through small town)	+2
Instrumental in gaining control of a median community (large town to large city)	+4
Instrumental in gaining control of a major community (metropolis)	+8
Defeat a larger force in combat	+1
Kills a high-ranking follower of Heironeous in honorable combat	+1/4 opponent's CR
Captures/destroys a relic or sacred object of Heironeous	+2
Destroys/conquers a site dedicated to Heironeous	+4
Commands a unit within an army during a major war	+2
Commands an army during a major war	+6
Surrenders in combat	-2
Fails to obey a superior officer	-4
Fails in combat against a follower of Heironeous	-8
Flees from battle	-10

Titles, Benefits, and Duties: To gain a new rank and its associated benefits, a member of the Fist of Tyranny must have been victorious in at least one engagement against followers of Heironeous who possessed equal or greater numbers.

	Affiliation	
Rank	**Score**	**Title: Benefits and Duties**
0	3 or lower	None
1	4-12	**Conscript:** Gains a +1 dodge bonus to AC when adjacent to at least one ally.
2	13-18	**Praetorian:** Gains +2 bonus on saves to resist charm or compulsion effects.
3	19-29	**Crusader:** Once per day, when you successfully drop a chaotic opponent to 0 hit points or below, you may make an additional attack at your highest attack bonus at the end of the round.
4	30 or higher	**Justicar:** Once per day, smite chaos (see paladin's smite evil class feature, *Player's Handbook* 44) as a paladin of equal level.

SPECIFIC ROLEPLAYING APPLICATIONS

Favored Feats: Skill at arms is highly prized, but the ability to lead effectively is sought out. It is common for higher-ranking members of this order to have the Leadership feat. Combat Expertise and the associated feats are common, since they are effective in destroying the combat effectiveness of other military units. Given the rigorousness of the training involved, feats such as Toughness or Iron Will are also appropriate.

Favored Combat Tactics: The followers of the Fist of Tyranny adhere to the tenets of strict military doctrine. Several smaller units (typically 50-100 combatants, usually referred to as a cohort) make up a legion, moving in concert with one another. Smaller units are uncommon but not unheard of. Typically members of the Fist of Tyranny are in a leadership position and even those who hold the rank of conscript are responsible for at least five to ten capable warriors.

In any engagement, large or small, the followers of Hextor are shrewd and canny combatants. Combatant commanders control the ebb and flow of battle through communication and will; their orders are obeyed unquestioningly and without hesitation. Fighting as a single unit, they excel through discipline and purpose. Their training and experience makes them extremely adaptable in combat. When

committed to a cause, they fight tenaciously. However, they avoid throwing away the lives of competent warriors and rarely commit to endeavors that do not serve to further their aims.

Favored Adventure Types: Bordering on the mercenary, members of the Fist of Tyranny actively seek out military conflicts. Once they enter into a contract or commitment, they fulfill it to the letter. No treachery is tolerated, and any breach in contract is likely to result in immediate and direct retaliation. However, once the contract is concluded, there are no guarantees. When not actively campaigning, they seek to bring order to lawless lands and people. Above all else, the followers of Hextor seek to oppose Heironeous and his ilk at every opportunity.

Favored Oaths: Battle oaths are typically a mark of distinction within the ranks of the armies of Hextor and vary from cohort to cohort and legion to legion. They usually have something to do with conquest such as "Strength in victory," or "Mercy is for the weak." "Death to the unworthy" is another common oath and a not-so-subtle reference to Heironeous and his followers.

NERULL: THE FANE OF THE SKULL

All things have a purpose, even if it is not immediately obvious. Through knowledge and understanding, we master the world around us. Without this understanding, efforts are unfocused and time is wasted. Your life serves as an example of such wasted effort. Perhaps in death we can find the purpose that eluded you.

The Fane of the Skull exists to study death. To this end, they have perfected their art in all of its forms: everything from natural death and carefully planned assassinations, to wholesale slaughter and decimation. Death in all of its forms serves to bring greater power to Nerull. And those who excel at it curry greater favor. Non-evil members are a bit more discerning. They believe that death comes to all things in time; it need not be hastened.

It is this point in which the followers are divided: The evil-aligned orders seek to spread death and undeath. Those more neutrally aligned, however, see undeath as a gift: It is something that should be used sparingly. Both factions are consummate students and academicians, and they pursue any opportunity to study death or educate the unenlightened about the various intricacies of death and undeath.

The study of death includes the exploration of undeath. Both are seen as alternative forms of existence. While death is natural and the right of all living things, non-evil followers believe undeath is something that very few are truly worthy of earning. Mindless undead in particular are viewed in a mixed light, controlled undead serve a purpose, and uncontrolled undead are not viewed positively. More often than not, uncontrolled undead are corralled, studied, and, in many cases, destroyed.

The non-evil members of the Fane, who believe that where living things are concerned, life ends naturally, rarely feel the need to hasten this process. They feel that mindless undead, however, are far too random and disruptive. They may seek out infestations of undead from which to learn and then they eventually eliminate them. They keep their true motives secret, though, and allow others to see their actions in whatever light they so choose. It makes no difference to the Fane of the Skull as long as they are allowed to operate unmolested.

One thing all the sects have in common is patience. The Fane of the Skull takes the long view, and it attempts to predict how specific actions will achieve the maximum effect. Death is inevitable, so it is always best to wait for the right place and time. It is not unheard of for members of this dark cult to wait years (in some cases decades or even centuries) to see the culmination of a carefully laid plain. The few individuals who are aware of this group attribute their patience to the fact that many of the followers of Nerull are undead, but even the living members tend to have the implacable patience of their un-living brethren.

While warriors and assassins sometimes find their way into the ranks, spellcasters (both arcane and divine) join the Fane of the Skull far more frequently. More prominent members are often necromancers of one sort or another. Most members often style themselves as "students of death." Many lead innocuous lives, hidden in plain sight while waiting for the right opportunity or circumstances to arrive. Less common are those who seek to eradicate or control the various plagues of mindless undead.

Enemies and Allies: Followers of Nerull tend to be self-reliant and extremely suspicious of others, even their own peers. Many count the undead followers subject to their will as the only allies they can rely on. Most intelligent beings fear Nerull and his followers (rightly so) and actively shun a follower's presence if they are aware of her true affiliation. Most members of the Fane of the Skull are content to

let the masses remain ignorant of their affiliation, especially if it gives them the opportunity to learn or teach about death. In lands where other religions have less influence, non-evil Nerullites often have a hand in rituals involving the care and handling of the deceased.

Members: Only the lower and mid-ranked individuals are still likely to be counted among the living. Living followers often serve as spies who infiltrate various organizations and relay information back to their masters, both living and otherwise. Higher-ranked individuals often surround themselves with various forms of undead minions who are usually more resilient, reliable, and, most importantly, easily replicable.

Scale: 12 (multiregional).

Affiliation Score Criteria: While not all members of this organization are evil, most are at least partially neutral.

	Affiliation Score
Criterion	**Modifier**
One-Time	
Character level	+1/2 levels
Evil alignment	+1
Knowledge (religion) 5-9 ranks	+1
Knowledge (religion) 10 or more ranks	+2
Specialized in the necromancy school of magic	+1
Has knowledge of one of the following domains: Death, Evil, Trickery	+1
Can cast 3rd-level or higher necromancy spells	+1
Has an undead template	+1/4 LA rounded up (minimum +1)
Gains an undead template	+1/2 LA rounded up (minimum +1)
Currently controls an undead retinue	+1/4 CR of highest undead controlled
Has an undead ally/familiar	+1
Abandons necromancy school of magic	-2
Multiple Use	
Kills 10 or more living creatures in 1 day	+1
Gains control of undead (unintelligent) and maintains control for at least one month	+1/4 the CR of the highest undead controlled in this attempt
Gains control of undead (intelligent) and maintains control for at least one month	+1/2 the CR of the highest undead controlled in this attempt
Instrumental in the death of a small community (thorpe through small town)	+2
Instrumental in the death of a median community (large town to large city)	+4
Instrumental in the death of a major community (metropolis)	+8
Creates intelligent undead	+1/4 the highest creature's HD
Prevents a creature from dying	-1/4 the creature's HD
Prevents an intelligent humanoid from dying	-1/2 the humanoid's HD
Loses an undead template	-1 per LA lost
Is willing to be brought back to life	-4
Brings a dead humanoid or intelligent being back to life (includes wish and miracle spells)	-10

Titles, Benefits, and Duties: The rank of reaper is reserved only for those who have demonstrated the highest dedication to the will and intent of their master: They must either possess an undead template or levels in a necromantic class or prestige class to attain this rank.

Affiliation

Rank	Score	Title: Benefits and Duties
0	3 or lower	None
1	4-12	**Scribe:** Gain a +4 bonus on Knowledge (religion) checks made regarding undead.
2	13-18	**Printer:** Gains a +2 bonus on saves to resist the special attacks of undead creatures.
3	19-29	**Binder:** Once per day, create undead as per the animate dead spell (PHB 198) with a caster level equal to half your character level. No material component required. Undead created in this manner last only 8 hours before falling inert.
4	30 or higher	**Reaper:** Once per day, call upon a dread wraith (MM 258) to serve you for up to an hour. At the end of the service (or if it is destroyed) the dread wraith dissipates. This dread wraith cannot create spawn.

ROLEPLAYING APPLICATIONS

Favored Feats: Skill at arms is rare within this order; subtlety over force is always the most desired method. Among divine casters, Improved Turning and Extra Turning are common feats, allowing greater control over undead. Feats that augment spellcasting are also commonly desired by either divine or arcane casters: Silent Spell and Still Spell are useful in avoiding detection, as is Eschew Materials. Those who are more oriented toward offense find Heighten Spell and Spell Penetration useful.

Favored Combat Tactics: The Fane of the Skull always prefers treachery and misdirection, and they avoid direct combat if possible. Fortunately, most followers of Nerull tend to surround themselves with various types of undead. Common tactics rely on the use of undead as a diversion to draw unwanted attention elsewhere. This usually involves a large number of expendable, mindless undead such as zombies or skeletons. If the foes are more powerful, undead of greater power are used. An especially favored tactic is to isolate individuals from larger groups, killing them and sending them to their former compatriots as undead minions to instill fear and panic.

Favored Adventure Types: Worshipers of Nerull are constantly looking for new ways to spread death in his name both directly and indirectly. To this end, any knowledge or necromantic lore is extremely tantalizing. The discovery of a new type of undead would prove of interest to Nerull's followers, as would any knowledge pertaining to the refinement of lichdom.

Favored Oaths: "Life passes, only death is eternal," and "Death is the first step to true power," are the most common oaths, along with, "All things end in time."

VECNA: THE HALLS OF SECRETS

Trust is a weakness, easily gained and exploited. Nothing can be taken for granted. Only by questioning will you find the real truth of the matter. In seeking the truth, you can trust no one. No one is your friend; confidants can betray you, willingly or otherwise. Be confident in your knowledge, but not prideful.

The Halls of Secrets is often dismissed as a myth or rumor. Many speak of it only in whispers, though some openly mock it as a "children's story." The true members would have it no other way. Discovery means destruction -- all followers of Vecna learn this mantra. This goes double for those who have attained the knowledge of the Halls of Secrets. More enlightened followers believe that the Halls of Secrets refer to the individual's own mind, since it is the one place that is truly secure (or so they believe).

While true followers are not impressed with speculation about the Halls of Secrets, they actively encourage guesswork to keep those they view as "weak-willed" properly occupied. The truth is far less insidious: Knowledge is the truest form of power. Such power is often wasted on the unenlightened, who squander it because they do not understand it. Only those who take the time to delve into the mysteries of the world to discover the truth are worthy of such power.

Neutral followers are less bent on pushing Vecna's agenda as they are their own. Everything is a means to an end. They follow the philosophy of Vecna, seeing his existence as proof that knowledge is the path to power. They accept that through dedication and study it is possible to achieve not only immortality, but divinity. This is not to say that all members of this organization have aspirations of godhood, but many believe it's a good place to start.

Kas's betrayal of his master is an oft-cited example of why trust is a weakness: the pursuit of power can be derailed pretty easily sometimes. To this end, most members of the Halls of Secrets keep the truth of their affiliation and study to themselves. Every piece of knowledge is evaluated and weighed. It is rarely shared, even with close companions and confidants. Neutral-aligned followers more freely share their information if the benefit outweighs the risk, but they still parcel out their knowledge in bits, giving allies only what they need to know.

Prospective seekers are culled from the countless individuals lost in the deception woven by Vecna and his followers. Those who discern the fragments of truth find themselves quickly caught up in a web of intrigue, knowledge, and power. The lowest ranks are

mockingly referred to as "Trusted" in reference to both their lack of knowledge and understanding. In other words, they don't know enough to know they don't know anything and are therefore not a threat -- they are trusted because they are ultimately predictable and cannot compromise the fellowship.

Enemies and Allies: Vecna is typically seen as a bane to almost all civilized folk. His followers are viewed as corruptors and deceivers of the worst sort. However, many individuals and organizations are constantly working to further the goals of the former lich who has achieved godhood, whether they know it or not.

Members: Members of the Halls of Secrets are a covert lot at best. They draw their numbers mostly from academicians and scholars. Mages and priests are the most common, seeking greater power to further their own ends.

Scale: 12 (multiregional).

Affiliation Score Criteria: Members of the Hall of Secrets must be at least partially neutral. Good and evil, law and chaos are simply differing points of view. Given that the followers of this sect are usually self-serving, they are typically neutral evil, but they lean more toward neutrality than any other extreme. Neutral and lawful neutral followers are rare, but not unlikely. The latter, while less common, tend to be more successful within the ranks.

	Affiliation Score
Criterion	**Modifier**
One-Time	
Character level	+1/2 levels
Knowledge (any) 5 ranks	+1
Knowledge (religion, history, or arcana) 5-9 ranks	+1
Knowledge (religion, history, or arcana) 10 or more ranks	+2
Can cast 3rd-level or higher divination spell	+1
Has knowledge of one of the following domains: Evil, Knowledge, or Magic	+1
Has at least one level in the loremaster class	+1
Multiple Use	
Avoids discovery (as a follower of Vecna) by deceiving a foe	+1/4 CR of the most powerful creature
Creates a new spell or magic item	+1
Recovers an ancient, previously lost piece of knowledge	+2
Recovers an ancient, previously lost piece of knowledge pertaining specifically to Vecna	+4
Steals secret knowledge from an organization and powerful entity	+4
Deceives someone into recovering a valuable item	+1/1,000 gp in value
Discovers a powerful unholy or magic item	+1/1,000 gp in value
Is caught in a deception	-4
Is discovered as a worshiper of Vecna	-8
Loses or destroys secret knowledge pertaining to the church or Vecna	-10

Titles, Benefits, and Duties: Above all else, members of the Halls of Secrets hold to the philosophy "Discovery is death." In most cases, when a member is discovered for whom they really are by individuals outside of the church, they are killed in the conflict that ensues. Those few who survive discovery are disavowed and cast from the order, losing all rank and associated benefits. It is unknown if any have ever rejoined the ranks after being discovered.

Affiliation

Rank	Score	Title: Benefits and Duties
0	3 or lower	None
1	4-12	**Seeker:** Once per day, gain a +5 bonus on any one Knowledge check.
2	13-18	**Deceiver:** Shift your alignment by 1 axis from your actual alignment (lawful/chaotic, evil/neutral) once per day. This can be done as an immediate action, and the shift is not detectable unless you are already under the effect of an ability that detects alignment. This is a constant effect lasting as long as you are conscious.
3	19-29	**Scryer:** Once per day, re-roll any single attack, save, or check.
4	30 or higher	**Watcher:** Designate an item to be attuned. This item does not need to be magical. If the item is not a magic item, it radiates a faint, nonspecific magic aura. Once per day, you can focus on the attuned object, and observe and hear the area in the object's immediate vicinity. This ability functions as the spell *clairaudience/clairvoyance* centered on the focus with a caster level equal to your character level. Performing this action requires your full and undivided attention. Any action breaks the link. This link can be maintained for your Wisdom modifier in hours (minimum 1).

ROLEPLAYING APPLICATIONS

Favored Feats: With such a devotion to knowledge and power, it is rare to find a ranking member of the Halls of Secrets without Skill Focus in a particular field of knowledge. The acquisition of power is a very close second, however, and any feat that augments spellcasting is a likely candidate. True power however, lies in how you can apply your knowledge. To this end, the item creation feats are commonly chosen since they allow for the creation of items for specific purposes as opposed to relying on luck to discover something or expending resources on acquiring an existing item that may not be powerful enough or be suitable for a specific task.

Favored Combat Tactics: Followers of Vecna rarely become directly involved in conflicts. They consider such endeavors far beneath them. Most use various types of proxies and minions to accomplish such goals. However, any time they are forced to engage in combat they do so with terrifying commitment and overwhelming power. If there is even the suspicion that their knowledge might be compromised, they go to excessive lengths to make sure nothing and no one remains.

Favored Adventure Types: Followers of Vecna often venture to remote regions, where they seek out lost sites of knowledge and power. Far removed from prying eyes, they operate more openly, with little fear of reprisal. In civilized lands, however, they work under such a veil of secrecy and deception that their activities are often kept secret even from one another. Contrary to popular belief, those affiliated with the Hall of Secrets have little interest in the Hand and Eye of Vecna. The power of these artifacts is well known to them and pursuing them is often seen as a waste of time and resources. They are more than content to allow lesser followers of Vecna seek out these items. A common practice among followers is to employ a foolhardy party of adventurers to engage in such pursuits, which allows the Halls of Secrets to pursue more useful endeavors unmolested.

Favored Oaths: Followers of Vecna rarely invoke his name directly. Common oaths include "By his hand!" or "By the hand and eye!" in reference to the infamous relics of Vecna. These are commonly uttered out of frustration as much as anything. "Ignorance is death" is another common saying.

About the Author

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Ecology of the Fire Archon

by Matthew Sernett
Art by Randy Gallegos
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The Ecology of, Archive
Dragon 361

"Souls made of fire, and children of the sun, With whom revenge is virtue." -*The Revenge*, Edward Young

Living flames forged by blazing magic, fire archons exist to destroy. Overrun and consume, take all and leave nothing but ashes -- these are the desires that burn within fire archons' incandescent souls from their first moments. Always hungry for conquest, these elemental mercenaries work for anyone with power and the promise of many victories.

History

In an ancient time, when the world had hardly been formed, primordial beings battled the gods for control of creation. In this cataclysmic conflict, the deific host marshaled armies of angels and cadres of exarchs, and though the primordials could call forth titanic beasts and their giant children, they could not muster a true military to face their enemies. To match their foes, the consummate creators gave being to a means by which elemental creatures could be recreated -- reshaped and hammered into soldiers. The warriors formed through this process were the first archons.

Fire archons believe that the honor of being the primordials' first soldiers belongs to them, but that is a secret only the gods and primordials remember. Regardless of which type was first, the presence of the archons turned the tide of battle in the primordials' favor. Given life, the archons could reproduce themselves, building armies faster than giants could be born or angels ordained. Their uncontrolled creation pleased the primordials and worried the gods.

Thus it was that one deity devised the plan that would starve the archon armies of troops. Rather than combat the archons directly, the gods' forces attacked the creatures and energies that served as the archons' source. To create an archon, one needs another elemental being. Virtually any kind will do. That creature is then remade into an archon in a magic foundry built upon a well of elemental power. The angels, exarchs, and gods set about destroying any elementals they encountered and diverting or ruining the largest sources of elemental energy in the Elemental Chaos.

Some reshaped the elemental spirits rather than destroy them. Medusas are said by some to be earth spirits reformed by Zehir. Others blame doppelgangers upon Sehanine's reshaping of water elementals. Yet the vast majority of elementals were slain. Whole races were snuffed out or driven so far to the brink that none have seen one of them to this day. Efreeti remember this time as the Desolation in their legends, and they believe that the Elemental Chaos still hasn't recovered.

The gods might have done more damage, but their defeat of the primordials made continued conflict wasteful. Without the gods' forces to fight, and with no clear direction, the archons began to clash with one another. Some fell into ranks behind powerful archon leaders. Others aligned with powerful children of the primordials who tried to fill the power void left by their creators. The once innumerable archons ground down their number and might have disappeared altogether had not some races, such as the efreeti, preserved the means for their renewal.

Today, archons are just one type of creature among the countless beings that inhabit the Elemental Chaos. Their numbers wax and wane as different armies of archons go through cycles of creation and conflict, flaring up and burning themselves out as they prepare for war and engage in it.

Knowledge of the Fire Archon

The following table shows the results of a Knowledge (the planes) check as it relates to fire archons. A result provides the information at the given DC and the information from all lower DCs.

DC	Result
12	Fire archons are a warlike race of fiery elemental beings. Roughly humanoid in shape, they wield weapons and wear armor.
15	There are other archons consisting of other elemental forces. They seem similar in many respects besides the elemental material encased in their armor.
20	Unlike aimless elementals, fire archons have a militaristic culture based on continual conquest. This seems to be true of all fire archons from the moment of their creation. Other archons are militaristic, but none are as rampantly destructive as the fire archons.
25	Fire archons can be created through a difficult ritual involving the use of a special forge built upon a concentration of elemental fire. Once created, a fire archon owes no fealty to its creator, but a person with the power to subdue the fire archon can control it through intimidation.
30	Fire archons were created by the primordials in their war against the gods. The secret of creating fire archons was stolen by the efreeti and it disseminated from them to others. Most fire archons are now either created by other fire archons or the efreeti. When archons created by the efreeti build upon and alter the lands they conquer, they try to recreate the greatest of the efreeti cities, the City of Brass.

Physiology

Fire archons exist as creatures of living flame, but their bodies aren't so mutable as a flickering fire. Every fire archon has two arms, a torso, and a head. Their lower bodies take the form of single conflagrations rather than separate legs.

Despite lacking a skeletal structure, their upper bodies conform in motion to human norms. Their arms are equivalent to a human's, with clearly positioned shoulders, elbows, and hands. Fire archon fingers seem to blend together into a mittenlike form or separate into true digits depending on their need. Whether this is due to the obscuring effect of the flames or a true joining of fiery flesh is unclear, but no fire archon has ever been seen to be missing a finger or limb. If such a member is severed, the fire archon instantly grows another while the severed part burns away in a swirl of fire and smoke. The only exceptions seem to be the head and the torso. Severing these parts from the body is damage sufficient to kill a fire archon instantly.

A fire archon's head has a defined front and back, but it typically lacks facial features. Brighter eyelike points can appear on their faces when they become agitated or angry, and they see as well as most humanoids. Their bodies typically provide light equivalent to a bonfire, and thus they illuminate any darkened area they enter, obviating the need for darkvision. Fire archons seem incapable of diminishing the light their bodies emit, and thus they would find hiding from foes difficult in most situations. However, fire archons aren't inclined toward stealth even when it would benefit them, preferring instead to alert their foes to their presence by sending up columns of smoke from things and creatures they burn. The lower body of a fire archon is one large flame rather than legs. As with other archons, fire archons glide about on a column of their constituent element. The exact method of this locomotion is poorly understood, but it is assumed to resemble a slug's movement, with the fire archon somehow gliding over a thin layer of super-heated air.

Although made of transparent and flickering flames, and apparently empty of organs, a fire archon has a solid form. Those brave enough to have touched a fire archon's body describe it as being like holding a boiling bag of writhing snakes. A fire archon held in this way is certainly very hot, but it does not truly burn. The archon can set things ablaze with its body, but this seems to require some concentration -- something that a fire archon is incapable of while wrestling or in combat. This solidity gives the archon a weight roughly equivalent to an elf of similar stature, but since they tend to stand close to 7 feet tall, they often weigh close to 200 pounds.

Fire archons must "breathe" in the sense that a fire needs air. Without it, they dwindle and die, suffocated by the lack of fuel. Similarly,

fire archons must "eat." Periodically, they must concentrate on burning an object completely to ash. A fire archon might accomplish this by holding the item, standing over it, or even placing it within the fire archon's face and "swallowing" it. Yet like other elementals, fire archons shall never know the joy of dreams or the terror of nightmares for they do not sleep.

Psychology

The primordials created fire archons to be their soldiers, and they come into being with a soldier's mindset. From their first conscious thought, fire archons expect battle and are ready to serve in war. Fire archons seem to recognize the authority of other fiery creatures automatically and fall into ranks for them. Yet others who summon or create them must first cow them by some show of superior force. Once they know their place, fire archons serve willingly so long as their needs are met, particularly the need for conquest.

Fire archons think of everything in terms of conflict. They remain ever aware of what side they are on, their subordinates and commanders, what creatures are current foes, and which enemies are ones they must face in some later fight. This extreme perspective might make them appear brutish, but they possess astonishing cunning and a general's grasp of tactics. Underestimating a fire archon is a sure way to see it gain the upper hand.

Just as a fire archon must breathe and eat, so must they conquer and destroy. Such activity nourishes and energizes them. Without it, they grow restless at first and then careless and sluggish. This need for new ventures keeps fire archons on the move and on the offensive. Defeats, the need to build and train forces, and planning can cause them to stop for long periods, but unless a foe can destroy them utterly, it's often best to attempt to redirect their fury toward easier targets.

Society

Left to their own devices, fire archons adopt a society based on a rough military structure. Physical and strategic contests, usually not lethal, are used to determine rank. Fire archons are quick to acknowledge superior power and intellect in another fire creature, so competitions tend to be few and brief unless there are several contestants of very similar power. Despite their warlike natures, fire archons aren't inclined toward fractiousness and infighting. Fire archons on the opposite sides of a conflict will happily slaughter one another, but within a force, fire archons prefer to focus their aggression outward.

The number of "ranks" in a fire archon society depends upon how many fire archons there are. A leader has five followers, who each in turn have five followers. This structure flows downward to the lowest rank. Each member in a group of five takes its orders from any of the members of a group of five individuals of the next highest rank. Uneven numbers of groups are placed in the lowest rank. Any odd number in a rank filters in as extra members of one of the other groups rather than forming a group of less than five. Similarly, attrition results in eventual redistribution into groups of five. Thus a hundred fire archons would typically have one leader, five subcommanders, twenty-five captains, and sixty-nine members in its lowest rank.

Scholars can't be certain of the significance of the number five, and fire archons themselves simply see it as "natural" and "efficient." In numbers less than five, fire archons see themselves as individuals rather than brethren, and they become less efficient and less willing to work as a team. Those who seek to subjugate fire archons should keep this in mind. Similarly, the rank structure of fire archons doesn't allow an outsider to elevate a favored archon above its personal merits. Doing so can result in the archons flouting commands while they follow the old structure, or the favored member might be ostracized from the ranks, resulting in a reorganization and poor cooperation with the favored member. Material goods, particularly weapons and armor that can make a favored archon more powerful, presents a much better way to reward service.

All fire archon societies inevitably strike outward, and the leader determines the direction and target. When they do, the archons seek to lay waste to nearly everything they encounter. Archons tend to avoid building or creating anything, but they will make fortifications when fighting a long-term conflict or to protect a valuable resource, such as a fire font and foundry. Fire archons prefer not to do such work themselves, and when possible, they enslave conquered people and use them for forced labor. Such slaves face a bleak existence held by captors that have no empathy and no use for them once the job is done. Slaves with an interest in their future therefore find ways to remain useful, playing upon the fire archon's sense of superiority and concern about foes.

Many fire archons owe their existence to the efreeti, and these archons seek to emulate their creators, even long after being freed from their control. They are far more inclined to take and keep slaves, build structures, and secure territory. They often attempt to create an environment similar to that which surrounds the City of Brass -- a task aided by the effect the presence of fire archons can have on the environment.

When fire archons gather in numbers, they set fire to things and their bodies produce heat, but these factors cannot explain the drought that presages the army's march or the eruption of long-dormant volcanoes. It seems that simply having fire archons in an area creates a sympathetic link to the qualities of heat and flame. Created by elemental flame and composed of it, fire archons seem to form a peculiar gateway for the power of fire in the Elemental Chaos. It's said that within a mile of even a single fire archon, a candle flame burns an inch higher and a single spark can kindle a coal.

Creating a Fire Archon

Fire archons cannot reproduce by any typical means. Instead, they are created from another elemental's body and spirit. To accomplish this, a ritual must be performed in a magic foundry infused with elemental fire. The nature of the elemental summoned by the ritual is not important. It might be a dumb earth beast or a highly intelligent elemental with ties to water. The ritual taps into the creative and recreative power of the primordials, wholly transforming that creature's form and soul. Needless to say, most consider the creation of a fire archon a wholly evil act.

A foundry must be constructed upon a powerful font of elemental fire. That kind of upwelling of fiery energy can be found in the Elemental Chaos as rivers of fire hurtling through space, lakes of molten air flickering in glowing caverns, or great crystals brilliant with internal infernos. Fire fonts can be found on other planes as well. They are most common in places such as volcanoes or tunnels where magma flows, but fire fonts aren't beholden to other sources of heat. A fire font might act as a gateway to the Elemental Chaos or from it to another plane. Or a fire font can be a concentration of elemental energy native to the plane on which it is found. One might be a holdover from the days of creation, a seam in the plane that was never sown shut. Another might be a weakness in danger of widening or perhaps a vent to let power escape so that it is does not build. In all cases, fire fonts are miraculous places of fantastic appearance.

Fire archon foundries vary in appearance, but all have two elements in common: a summoning crucible and a forge. The summoning crucible serves as the transformation space for the summoned elemental creature. It must be large enough to hold the elemental and have the power of the fire font coursing through it. The summoning crucible must have elements designed to focus the fire energy and use it as a binding force. Held in place and infused with this energy, the summoned creature can then be destroyed and reincarnated by the ritual. It must then be encased in armor from the forge.

Although a fire archon can remove its armor and wear different armor during its life, the encasement of its energies in armor from the foundry's forge is a crucial element of the ritual. Without that final step, the fire archon might expire or lack the intelligence and soldier's mindset at best, and at worst, it might grow into something powerful and uncontrollable that seeks revenge for its torturous transformation.

The forge itself rarely appears like a common forge. Using the fire font as a source of heat and flame and elemental energies as hammers and forms, the forge can be an unrecognizable contraption of magic and arcane elements.

A working foundry can produce fire archons as often as the ritual can be performed and for as long as the foundry's resources are maintained. The power of the fire font the foundry is built upon determines the type of fire archon created. As the fire energy fluctuates in strength, so too do the results of the ritual. A fire font at ebb generates basic fire archons, while at high flow it produces the more powerful fire archons, such as blazesteels or ash disciples. Creatures without fiery souls should beware creating fire archons beyond their ability to quell.

Fire Archon Weapons and Armor

The fury of a fire archon's form is contained by its armor, and its first suit of armor is integral to its being inasmuch as a human or elf must have skin and bones. After time however, a fire archon can change its original armor for new should it choose to do so. Many never see the need, but fire archons that evolve or gain levels often perceive the value of a different armor strategy.

Fire archons choose a new armor for the armor's capabilities or they may pick a piece to replace a sundered piece. Armor generally takes the form of a breastplate and pauldrons, but other elements such as bracers, girdles, vambraces, and helms are not uncommon. Breastplate, full plate, chain mail, and chain shirts are most common. Nonmagic organic materials such as leather are destroyed over time because a fire archon unconsciously burns the material when it eats.

Fire archons craft weapons and armor of amazing quality and stunning appearance. Using instinctual knowledge of metallurgy, fire archons craft only items of masterwork quality. Their work is on par with that of dwarves, but of course, the two are easy to tell apart. A flame motif decorates nearly everything a fire archon crafts, and its work looks seamless because it is.

Fire archons can use many different weapons, but they prefer those that remind them of the flickering tongues of fire. Thus they avoid heavy or bludgeoning weapons, and enjoy scimitars, falchions, and even lighter weapons such as rapiers. Metal weapons are a must, since most fire archons can transfer the heat of their bodies through weapons to burn foes -- an impractical attack if the medium for that transference turns to ash.

Behind the Scenes: Monster Evolution
The fire archon derives its origin from two places: the desire for more interesting elemental monsters and **Dreamblade**. When we sat down to discuss which creatures would carry forward to the new edition, what would be in the first *Monster Manual*, and what would inhabit the various planes in the new cosmology, the need for more interesting elemental foes came up again and again. This problem first reared its head in the bland nature and conflicting natures of elementals of 3rd Edition.

Fire Fonts as Adventure Locations

A fire font presents a great opportunity for a cool adventure location. Let your imagination run wild. Put it anywhere you like, and use it as an excuse to make a truly magical location. Flame throwers in the walls and floor, flying bonfires, jets of fire that leap from place to place, buildings of flickering crystal, inferno tornadoes that carry creatures about, stairs of smoke, blazes that act as teleport pads -- whatever you want.

The location might be a landmark in your campaign known half the world around for its miraculous powers. Or maybe it's a hidden resource jealously guarded beneath the ziggurat of some mortal ruler. It could be an ancient and lost mystery like the Fountain of Youth or it might have thrust itself up from the earth with cataclysmic suddenness.

Of course, it doesn't have to be all about fire damage. Some of the fires might not harm anything and instead act more like *continual flame* spells. Other fires might deal another type of damage, such as cold or acid. Use color to indicate what the fires do, but allow the players to experiment and learn. A blue flame might be cold and a black one negative energy. An upside-down fire might indicate a teleporter, while a fire that doesn't flicker might be solid as a rock.

A fire font gives you a dramatic backdrop and an excuse to plan some very dynamic encounters. Use the environment like monster in the fight. Allow it to become a character in the story of the adventure. You won't regret it.

Out with the Old

The elementals of 3rd Edition have no needs, no clear desires or motivations, and no culture, yet they attain human Intelligence, speak, and can manipulate objects. They exist in limitless numbers on the elemental planes, but they build nothing and make no lasting impression upon the game. Mechanically, they exist as neat creatures to summon or put in a dungeon and nothing more. What do they do on the elemental planes besides attack interlopers? What do they care about? In 3rd Edition, we have only vague ideas that they fight each other. If they were dumb beasts, they would make more sense. If they had a culture and did interesting things like invade the Material Plane, they would be better. But the elementals of 3rd Edition don't do either. Most creatures of the elemental type follow suit, and you have to look at outsiders such as salamanders and genies for interesting creatures with elemental themes.

Add to this the fact that the elementals' mechanics are either boring or complex. Most of them simply walk up to a PC and hit the character with a fist. Fire elementals at least do fire damage, but it hardly screams cool to face an elemental and have it act like an ogre without Power Attack. It doesn't even whisper it. The flip side of this includes mechanics such as the air elemental's whirlwind. Any mechanic that makes a person look up weather conditions in the *Dungeon Master's Guide* is just begging to be "forgotten" by the DM.

We tried to rectify this in the late stages of 3rd Edition. You can see various attempts in *Monster Manuals III*, *IV*, and *V*, the most successful probably being the avatars of elemental evil of *Monster Manual IV*. Yet such inventions were a band-aid on a scar over thirty years old. The new edition offered a chance to shuffle thing up a bit, give elementals a new hand, and deal in some new players.

In With the New

Of course, elementals -- those beings of the four elements that exist so people can summon them and put them in dungeons -- still exist in 4th Edition. We've given them a new story and some clean but cool mechanics, but this article isn't about them. It's about how else we filled the void for interesting elementally based creatures. The upcoming edition uses an altered list of creature types and uses type quite differently when it comes to mechanics. Thus creatures that seemed like they should be elementals (efreeti, salamanders, and so on) bear that type now. Yet even after reshuffling things, the game still cried out for more elemental baddies.

That's where **Dreamblade** comes in. The Flame Harrower caught the eye of several folks in R&D when it came out, and Bill Slavicsek

mentioned that he wanted something like that in 4th Edition. On a purely aesthetic level, the combination of a largely transparent miniature with some metallic parts is pleasing to the eye. It's like looking at jewelry or candy. However, we all agreed that the "metal underpants" were not a positive feature. To fix that, we decided that the future monster would have a lower body of solid elemental material.

So we had a hole to fill and a visual cool concept to fill it. All that remained were the name, flavor, and mechanics. The mechanics evolved over time. In fact, as I write this, we are playtesting, and I can't be sure that the current 4th Edition mechanics will remain. The flavor evolved somewhat, but we knew that we wanted them to see a lot of use, so we always planned on them being a somewhat mercenary force. The name was an easy choice, if a bit controversial to some.

Early on in the process of designing 4th Edition, we had many discussions of the elements of 3rd Edition that we could carry forward. We took a long look at which cows really were sacred and which would make fine rump roast. The animal-headed archons weren't high on anyone's list. They exist to fill out an alignment wheel of outsiders -- a dubious purpose -- and they're an inherently strange concept. In **D&D**'s universe, why do some angelic beings have horse heads? What population besides werebears and normal bears do bear angels serve? Add to their innate weirdness the fact that alignment and the planes work differently in 4th Edition, and there simply wasn't reason enough to preserve them.

Yet the word "archon" is powerful, and we knew we wanted 4th Edition to use it in a cooler way that would be more likely to see play than the angelic furries. Giving it to the new elemental beings we wanted in the game seemed a perfect fit. There could be no confusing them with the old archons, and using a cool word that would be familiar to many players would raise their profile.

Sample Fire Archons

The following statistics present three fire archons using 3rd Edition rules. The first fire archon has statistics similar to the Fire Archon miniature from the *Desert of Desolation* set. The second and third fire archons use 3rd Edition mechanics to mimic the fire archon's 4th Edition rules.

Fire Archon CR 6
hp 68 (8 HD); death throes

Often CE Medium elemental (extraplanar, fire)
Init +7; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +8, Spot +9
Languages Common, Ignan

AC 18, touch 13, flat-footed 15
(+3 Dex, +5 armor)
Immune critical hits, fire, flanking, paralysis, poison, sleep, stunning
Fort +6, **Ref** +13, **Will** +7
Weakness vulnerability to cold

Speed 30 ft. in breastplate (6 squares), base speed 40 ft. {{*see skill points below; original text just said 30 ft. (6 squares)*}}
Melee mwk scimitar +14/+9 (1d6+6 plus 1d6 fire/18-20) or
mwk scimitar +10/+5 (1d6+6 plus 1d6 fire/18-20) and
mwk scimitar +10 (1d6+3 plus 1d6 fire/18-20)
Base Atk +6; **Grp** +12
Special Actions death throes, fire burst

Abilities Str 23, Dex 24, Con 19, Int 13, Wis 16, Cha 16
SQ darkvision 60 ft., immunities, vulnerability to cold
Feats Iron Will, Two-Weapon Fighting, Weapon Focus (scimitar)
Skills Intimidate +14, Jump +14, Listen +8, Spot +9 {{*numbers I come up with if speed is base 30 ft (20 ft. with armor): 14/8/8/9; if speed is base 40 ft (30 ft. with armor), then these numbers work; I'm making the assumption that the base speed is 40 feet above based on the stats here.*}}
Possessions 2 masterwork scimitars, masterwork breastplate

Fire Burst (Su) Three times per day as a standard action, a fire archon can unleash a 10-foot radius burst of fire centered on itself. The fire causes 3d8 points of fire damage to creatures in the area (Reflex DC 18 for half).
Death Throes (Su) When a fire archon is reduced to 0 hit points, it explodes. Treat this effect as a fire burst attack that causes 5d8 points of damage.

Vulnerability to Cold (Ex) A fire archon takes half again as much (+50%) damage as normal from cold attacks.

Fire Archon Blazesteel CR 7
hp 105 (10 HD); wounded burst

Often CE Medium elemental (extraplanar, fire)
Init +8; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +12, Spot +12
Languages Common, Ignan, Terran

AC 20, touch 14, flat-footed 16
(+4 Dex, +4 armor, +2 shield)

Immune critical hits, fire, flanking, paralysis, poison, sleep, stunning
Fort +9, **Ref** +11, **Will** +8
Weakness vulnerability to cold

Speed 40 ft. (8 squares)
Melee mwk scimitar +16/+11 (1d6+7 plus 1d6 fire/18-20)
Base Atk +7; **Grp** +14
Combat Options flanking fire
Special Actions wounded burst

Abilities Str 25, Dex 19, Con 22, Int 14, Wis 16, Cha 15
SQ darkvision 60 ft., immunities, vulnerability to cold
Feats Combat Reflexes, Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Weapon Focus (scimitar)
Skills Balance +5, Intimidate +15, Jump +21, Listen +12, Spot +12, Tumble +15
Possessions masterwork scimitar, masterwork chain shirt, masterwork heavy steel shield

Wounded Burst (Su) If a fire archon blazesteel is reduced to half its hit points or reduced to 0 hit points, it unleashes a 10-foot radius burst of fire centered on itself. The fire causes 5d8 points of fire damage to creatures in the area (Reflex DC 21 for half).

Flanking Fire (Ex) When a fire archon blazesteel flanks a foe, it may make an extra basic attack against that foe whenever it attacks. In addition, the fire archon blazesteel's attacks against the flanked foe cause +1d6 points of fire damage for every other fire archon adjacent to the flanked target.

Vulnerability to Cold (Ex) A fire archon takes half again as much (+50%) damage as normal from cold attacks.

Fire Archon Ash Disciple CR 8
hp 119 (14 HD); death throes

Often CE Medium elemental (extraplanar, fire)
Init +10; **Senses** darkvision 60 ft.; Listen +12, Spot +12
Languages Common, Ignan, Terran

AC 21, touch 16, flat-footed 15
(+6 Dex, +5 armor)
Immune critical hits, fire, flanking, paralysis, poison, sleep, stunning
Fort +8, **Ref** +15, **Will** +9
Weakness vulnerability to cold

Speed 40 ft. (8 squares); flame step
Melee slam +16 (1d6+5 plus 1d6 fire and target catches fire)
Ranged fire bolt +16 (50-ft. range; 8d6+5 fire and foe catches fire; creatures adjacent to target take 1d6 fire)
Base Atk +10; **Grp** +15
Atk Options Point Blank Shot, Precise Shot
Special Actions cinder burst, death throes, flame step, flame wave

Abilities Str 21, Dex 23, Con 19, Int 15, Wis 16, Cha 17
SQ darkvision 60 ft., flame step, immunities, vulnerability to cold
Feats Improved Initiative, Iron Will, Point Blank Shot, Precise Shot, Weapon Focus (slam)
Skills Balance +8, Intimidate +18, Jump +26, Knowledge (the planes) +7, Listen +12, Spot +12, Survival +3 (+5 on other planes), Tumble +23
Possessions *+1 mithral shirt*

Cinder Burst (Su) Once per encounter as a standard action, a fire archon ash disciple can unleash a 10-foot radius burst of fire centered on itself. The fire causes 8d8 points of fire damage to creatures in the area and blinds them for 1 round (Reflex DC 21 for half and to avoid blindness).

Death Throes (Su) When a fire archon ash disciple is reduced to 0 hit points, it explodes. Treat this effect as a cinder burst attack that causes 10d8 points of damage.

Flame Step (Su) As a move action, a fire archon ash disciple can teleport to within 15 feet of any fire creature within 100 feet.

Flame Wave (Su) Once per encounter, a fire archon can unleash a wave of flames in a 30-ft. cone. Creatures in the area take 8d8 points of fire damage (Reflex DC 21 for half) and are pushed back two squares (no save).

Vulnerability to Cold (Ex) A fire archon takes half again as much (+50%) damage as normal from cold attacks.

About the Author

Matthew Sernett *has been a designer of 4th Edition, the Editor-in-chief of Dragon Magazine, a pizza cook, an onion packer, and an assembly line worker in a spring factory. In 1999, while working for Men's Health Magazine, he narrowly avoided being a wardrobe tracker in the male fashion industry. He feels very fortunate to now be employed as a creative designer for Gleemax.*

Bill's Holiday Present

by Bill Slavicsek
12/21/2007

I've been trying to decide what glimpse into the **D&D** 4th Edition process I could share with you this month. I wanted something cool, something big, something that said "Happy holidays" to everyone in the **D&D** community.

So I looked around at what the team and I are working on during these last few days of the work year. James Wyatt, Mike Mearls, and I are reviewing every playtest comment, every monster entry, and every rules element, but nothing in that process seems exactly right for what I'm imagining.

I'm busy putting the finishing touches on the skills chapter, paragon paths, epic destinies, and magic items, but that stuff still needs to go through the editors before it's ready for prime time viewing.

Michele Carter, Jeremy Crawford, and Kim Mohan -- excellent editors all -- are neck-deep in the *Player's Handbook*, scrubbing classes and powers so that they really shine and making sure that everything synchs up from one chapter to the next. One place where they feel pretty much done (at least until James, Mike, and I come back with an adjustment based on the feedback we're reviewing) is the races chapter. Maybe something in there will satisfy my holiday spirit ...

I just stepped over to talk to Andy Collins, my mechanical design and development manager (he oversees all of the mechanical game designers and developers that work on my team) to see what he thinks would make a good present. After a brief conversation, and a courtesy call to Scott Rouse to get his buy off, we're all in agreement. I'm going to share with you the first look at a **D&D** 4th Edition race entry. And, since it is the holiday season, what better place to start than with the elf.

In the current 4th Edition preview book, *Races and Classes*, we talked a bit about our approach to races. Let me add to that before you skim down to look at the elf. One of the changes that we decided on early for player character races was that we would only provide ability score bonuses. Penalties based on your choice of race are a thing of the past. We wanted to make sure each race had powers and abilities that set it apart and helped make it feel more like the race in question. We also worked on some size issues to make better sense of the various characters and their place in the world. Finally, we looked at the flavor and back story to make sure that each race had a unique role that didn't impinge on any of the other races in the game.

OK, enough with the chit-chat. Let's unwrap your present!

Elf

Quick, wary archers who freely roam the forests and wilds.

Racial Traits

Average Height: 5' 7"-6' 0"
Average Weight: 100-130 lb.

Ability Scores: +2 Dexterity, +2 Wisdom
Size: Medium
Speed: 7 squares
Vision: Low-light

Languages: Common, Elven
Skill Bonuses: +2 Nature, +2 Perception

Elven Accuracy
Elf Racial Power

With an instant of focus, you take careful aim at your foe and strike with the legendary accuracy of the elves.

Encounter
Free Action
Personal

Effect: Reroll an attack roll. Use the second roll, even if it's lower.

Elven Weapon Training: You gain proficiency with the longbow and the shortbow.
Wild Step: You ignore difficult terrain when you shift (even if you have a power that allows you to shift multiple squares).
Group Awareness: You grant non-elf allies within 5 squares a +1 racial bonus to Perception checks.
Elven Accuracy: You can use *elven accuracy* as an encounter power.

Wild and free, elves guard their forested lands using stealth and deadly arrows from the trees. They build their homes in close harmony with the forest, so perfectly joined that travelers often fail to notice that they have entered an elven community until it is too late.

Play an elf if you want ...

- to be quick, quiet, and wild;
- to lead your companions through the deep woods and pepper your enemies with arrows;
- to play a ranger, a rogue, or a cleric.

Physical Qualities

Elves are slender, athletic folk about as tall as humans. They have the same range of complexions as humans, tending more toward tan or brown hues. A typical elf's hair color is dark brown, autumn orange, mossy green, or deep gold. Elves' ears are long and pointed, and their eyes are vibrant blue, violet, or green. Elves have little body hair, but males often grow long sideburns. They favor a wild look to their hair, which is often a shaggy mass of braids.

Elves mature at about the same rate as humans but show few effects of age past adulthood. The first sign of an elf's advancing age is typically a change in hair color -- sometimes graying but usually darkening or taking on more autumnal hues. Most elves live to be well over 200 years old and remain vigorous almost to the end.

Playing an Elf

Elves are a people of deeply felt but short-lived passions. They are easily moved to delighted laughter, blinding wrath, or mournful tears. They are inclined to impulsive behavior, and members of other races sometimes see elves as flighty or impetuous, but elves do not shirk responsibility or forget commitments. Thanks in part to their long life span, elves sometimes have difficulty taking certain matters as seriously as other races do, but when genuine threats arise, elves are fierce and reliable allies.

Elves revere the natural world. Their connection to their surroundings enables them to perceive much. They never cut living trees, and when they create permanent communities, they do so by carefully growing or weaving arbors, tree houses, and catwalks from living branches. They prefer the primal power of the natural world to the arcane magic their eladrin cousins employ. Elves love to explore new forests and new lands, and it's not unusual for individuals or small bands to wander hundreds of miles from their homelands.

Elves are loyal and merry friends. They love simple pleasures -- dancing, singing, footraces, and contests of balance and skill -- and rarely see a reason to tie themselves down to dull or disagreeable tasks. Despite how unpleasant war can be, a threat to their homes, families, or friends can make elves grimly serious and prompt them to take up arms.

At the dawn of creation, elves and eladrin were a single race dwelling both in the Feywild and in the world, and passing freely between the two. When the drow rebelled against their kin, under the leadership of the god Lolth, the resulting battles tore the fey kingdoms asunder. Ties between the peoples of the Feywild and the world grew tenuous, and eventually the elves and eladrin grew into two distinct races. Elves are descended from those who lived primarily in the world, and they no longer dream of the Feywild. They love the forests and wilds of the world that they have made their home.

Elf Characteristics: Agile, friendly, intuitive, joyful, perceptive, quick, tempestuous, wild.

Male Names: Adran, Beiro, Carric, Erdan, Gennal, Heian, Lucan, Peren, Rollen, Soveliss, Therren, Varis.

Female Names: Adrie, Birel, Chaedi, Dara, Ennia, Farall, Harrel, Iriann, Lia, Mialee, Shava, Thia, Valenae.

Elf Adventurers

Three sample elf adventurers are described below.

Varis is an elf ranger and a devout worshiper of Melora, the god of the wilds. When a goblin army forced his people from their woodland village, the elves took refuge in the nearest human town, walled and guarded by soldiers. Varis now leads other elves and some human townsfolk in raids against the goblins. Although he maintains a cheerful disposition, he frequently stares into the distance, listening, expecting at any moment to hear signs of approaching foes.

Lia is an elf rogue whose ancestral forest burned to the ground decades ago. Lia grew up on the wasteland's fringes in a large human city, unable to quite fit in. Her dreams called her to the forests, while her waking hours were spent in the dirtiest parts of civilization. She joined a group of adventurers after trying to cut a warlock's purse, and she fell in love with the wide world beyond the city.

Heian is an elf cleric of Sehanine, the god of the moon. The elven settlement where he

was born still thrives in a forest untouched by the darkness spreading through the world, but he left home years ago, in search of new horizons and adventures. His travels lately have brought rumors to his ears that danger might be brewing in the ancient forest, and he is torn between a desire to seek his own way in the world and a sense of duty to his homeland.

Well, there you have it. The first unveiling of a full race entry from the 4th Edition *Player's Handbook*. Oh, what the heck. I'm feeling generous this morning. It must be the season. Here's a racial feat you can peek at, too.

Elven Precision [Elf]

Prerequisites: Elf, elven accuracy racial power, heroic tier
Benefit: When you use the *elven accuracy* power, you gain a +2 bonus to the new attack roll.

OK, I better stop here or I'll be tempted to show you the entire class chapter. Hmmm ... maybe next time? Anyway, have a great holiday season and remember to ...

Keep playing!

--Bill Slavicsek

About the Author

Bill Slavicsek is the R&D Director for Roleplaying Games, Miniatures, and Book Publishing at Wizards of the Coast. All of the game designers, developers, editors, book editors, and **D&D Insider** content managers working on **Dungeons & Dragons**, ***Star Wars***, and the WotC Publishing Group report into Bill's R&D team.

Why I'm Thankful

by Bill Slavicsek

11/21/2007

As the Thanksgiving holiday approaches, I've been thinking about what makes me thankful in regards to my work at Wizards of the Coast. Not only do I have the coolest, most fun job in the world (at least as far as I'm concerned), but I get to interact with an amazing collection of talented individuals on an hour-to-hour basis. From the R&D teams to the Brand Teams, Sales to Finance, Creative and Production Services, and our various support teams, Wizards is all about creativity and imagination, and I'm thankful that I get to work in this environment every day.

I'm also thankful, as far as work is concerned, that we're getting closer and closer to putting the finishing touches on the first 4th Edition **Dungeons & Dragons** products, and I'm thrilled at how those products are coming together. Our playtests have been running very well, with a good mix of reactions ranging from "that's cool," to "that works fine," and even some "that needs work." Just the kind of reactions we hope to see, reactions that help us refine and improve the game one rules mechanic at a time. To everyone who's participated and provided feedback, you have my heartfelt thanks. You're helping us make the best product possible, and I appreciate the effort.

And speaking of getting close, this is the time when we begin to share more detailed information with **D&D** players everywhere. I'm thankful that we can finally start to open up a little more and let you see what we're working on, so to speak. Some of this takes the form of a couple of preview products that are about to release, as well as the newest set of **D&D** miniatures, *Desert of Desolation*, which debuted two weeks ago.

Preview Products

Wizards Presents: Races and Classes hits the store shelves in a couple of weeks. This is the first of two 4th Edition preview products designed to provide you with a behind-the-curtain glimpse of the making of the 4th Edition of the **Dungeons & Dragons** Roleplaying Game. (The second is *Wizards Presents: Worlds and Monsters*, on sale in January.) Full of concept art, designer essays, and insights into R&D's thinking, *Races and Classes* previews the new version of the game from a player's perspective.

Races and Classes provides a bunch of great information and reveals a number of secrets, including:

- The nature and first look at the as-yet-unrevealed new player character race.
- A timeline of the design and development of 4th Edition, including notes from the design team.
- The top-secret 4th Edition design tenets.
- An overview of *Player Handbook* classes and power sources.
- A preview of classes slated for future development after the launch of the *Player's Handbook*.
- All kinds of background information, in-world stories, and anecdotes about what it takes to create a new edition.

Check out *Races and Classes* (and its companion volume, *Worlds and Monsters*) for amazing artwork, intriguing spoilers, and a ton of information on what's coming in the new edition -- from the first set of core books to future products later in the line. I know all this stuff, and I couldn't stop reading. Not only is it fascinating material, but it got my mind racing about characters I want to play and campaigns I want to run using the new edition. I think you'll have the same reaction.

Desert of Desolation

The newest set of **D&D** miniatures, *Desert of Desolation*, provides a different kind of look at 4th Edition. First off, every creature in the set exists in 4th Edition **D&D** and almost all of them will appear in the first *Monster Manual*. (One monster receives special treatment and will get its first updated statistics on **D&D Insider**.)

Second, this set showcases the first of our updates to the look and feel of **D&D** monsters. Now, when a monster looks just great, we've left it alone. But in cases where we felt we could improve the look of a monster, we've taken this opportunity to do so. Our new look for angels, for example, debuts in this set with the Angel of Vengeance. It's otherworldly, looks powerful, and has just the right mix of awe-inspiring and creepy to better define these servants of the gods. Another update can be seen in the Feral Troll, which continues the artistic evolution of one of the terrors of D&D that has been updated with each new edition of the game.

Third, this set reveals some monsters making their debut in 4th Edition. The Cyclops appears for the first time since 2nd Edition and looks fantastic, and the Fire Archon unleashes the first of a new elemental force on unsuspecting adventurers everywhere.

Finally, after thirteen sets, I've got my Gelatinous Cube at long last. I've been asking for this figure since the very beginning, and those early conversations got us to experiment with clear plastic and eventually led to the inclusion of the actual monster in this set. It's a great miniature, and it alone makes this set something special. Add those other elements I've talked about, and you begin to see why we're so excited about *Desert of Desolation*.

Of course, most of that focused on roleplaying. For skirmish players, this set marks the first time you'll be able to play the new edition of the **D&D Miniatures Game**. In January, we're putting the new rules online for everyone to use, and we're also providing updated stat cards for all of the figures in this set. Consider it our after-the-holidays gift to everyone who wants to start test-driving the new minis rules before the April launch.

That's all I've got time to talk about right now. Have a happy Thanksgiving and remember â€¦

Keep playing!

--Bill Slavicsek

About the Author

Bill Slavicsek *is the R&D Director for Roleplaying Games, Miniatures, and Book Publishing at Wizards of the Coast. All of the game designers, developers, editors, book editors, and* ***D&D Insider*** *content managers working on* ***Dungeons & Dragons****,* ***Star Wars****, and the WotC Publishing Group.*

Conception of a Full-Time Wizard

by Shelly Mazzanoble
12/14/2007

Confessions Archive
Dragon 361

I had a very **D&D** moment the other day. A few of us around the office like to run the stairs for exercise. I'm talking four flights. We're not exactly firefighters in training able to run the Empire State building with 135 pounds of dead weight on our backs. I can't even handle my iPod strapped to my arm.

So Bart, Adam and I get to the fourth floor landing and instead of his usual "Save yourselves. Let me lay here and die", Adam huffed out a "Cool!"

The doorway leading to the roof was propped open and without missing a beat, Adam and Bart trotted right through. Not even a Listen check! I, on the other-hand, paused at the threshold, convinced this was a trap. Surely there was a wasp queen who lived on the roof wanting to turn my friends into bisque. Maybe the rooftop is being repaired because it's unstable. Or worse: Maybe we'll get in trouble!

But then again, if one of the aforementioned things did happen and they needed me, I wouldn't be able to hear their pleas for help. So I followed, but lingered halfway in the long hallway. If they were to be chased out by goblins, I'd be leading the pack down the stairs. If they found something cool like an all-you-can-eat dessert buffet, I'd be third in line. They jogged back seconds later right past my post in the hallway.

"Nothing to see"Adam said.

Relieved, and somewhat disappointed, I raced them down the stairs to continue our workout.

The exact same scenario used to happen almost every time I played **D&D**. The rogue, the fighter and, well, just about everyone and their familiars, went racing into foreign territory while Astrid, my sorceress, hung back. Yeah, I know it was her job"but there have been times she was so far removed that she had to use her turn just to get within throwing distance of a *magic missile*.

If there's a column, she's behind it. A door? She'll shut it. A masterwork panic room, she's in it. Fantasy seeps into my reality all the time. (Perhaps a little more than it should.) But I hadn't realized how much of my reality plays **D&D**. Kind of defeats the purpose. I mean it is a game of *fantasy*, right?

Astrid was my portal into **D&D** and I wrote *Confessions* about her adventures. I couldn't help but feel protective of her. My group often went out of their way to defend her, sometimes resulting in their demise. Astrid - ok, I - took it hard, carrying the dust of their remains in her backpack in case we encountered a druid willing to reincarnate them. It never mattered though, because at our next session, their newly created character showed up at some tavern, joined our pack, and we resumed our travels. *It's that easy*, I thought? Losing Astrid would have crushed me. Maybe I was missing out on one of **D&D**'s biggest draws. Next time, I told myself, things will be different.

Next time was a 4th Edition playtest where I found myself caring for an eladrin wizard named Eztara. I had nothing to do with Eztara's conception"she was merely a robot wizard generated to test some new rules. Yet there I was, telling the group to call her Tara and retelling stories of her glory days at Wizard School. *Stop!* I reminded myself. *Tara isn't real*. She's a summer fling, single-use gadget. Good for a few adventures before you both move on. It worked too. Tara ended up in all sorts of situations Astrid wouldn't have dreamed of. She entered into strange rooms first. Strayed from the group. Got hit by some well-directed arrows courtesy of three hobgoblins she angered with a *fireblast*.

"Tara takes 5 points of damage"New DM practically cheered.

Big deal.

"Another 7 points."

Whoopie.

"That hits Tara for 6 points."

Bring it.

I had a pile of eraser shards next to my character sheet at the end of every session from deducting hit points. So this is what it's like to *really* play **D&D**. Forget the doors and columns. This I can get behind.

For someone who can't bear to say goodbye to a character, I love the character building part. When the time came to create my own, I brought my new "love 'em and lose 'em" attitude.

"It's better to have lost at **D&D**, then never to have played at all"I tell New DM.

"You sound like an 8th grader who just found out her crush asked her best friend to the dance."

(Weird. That actually happened in 8th grade. 9th grade too.)

"I'd like to stick with sorcerer for the block"I tell New DM in my best game show contestant voice.

"Oooh, sorry"he counters, sounding alarmingly close to Wink Martindale. "Sorcerers aren't part of 4th Edition yet."

Say what? Who's behind this madness, eliminating *my* class of people! I immediately brought my concerns to R&D.

"What about all those little girls who read about Astrid and want to grow up and be just like her?" I argued.

They did their best not to laugh, but Chris Perkins cracked, "*All* those little girls?"

"Ok. Me."

"You"Chris answered, soothing and sage-like, as he waved his hand Obi-Wan Kenobi style in front of me, "will be a wizard." No wonder people love playing in his games. He might as well have boinked me on the forehead and handed me my robes.

"I'm a wizard"I repeated all the way back to New DM. "I'm a wizard."

I was determined to create the "anti-Astrid" -- someone whose shoes probably involve Velcro and shock pads, and who carries bug spray and emergency ponchos in her rucksack. Someone I could never get attached to.

"A tiefling"I answer when New DM asks what race I'm thinking of.

"I see"he smirks, flipping to the proper section of the *Player's Handbook*. "You know about tieflings, right?"

"Duh."

Of course I do, and I love them. The whole overcoming a dark side, avenging their past, demons in the closet -- very *As the Planescape Turns*. I immediately filled out the personality section of my character sheet with adjectives like "disdainful""voracious"and "elitist." Tabitha's not here to win friends.

We're not in 3rd Edition anymore, and that quickly becomes obvious. First, the prototype character sheets look like The Container Store designed them. The new sheets are laid out like a well-maintained drawer. There's an easy-to-find compartment for your weapons, defenses, ability modifiers -- even your cash. And they're editable on your computer, so no more deciphering if that was a 6 or a -8 you wrote under hit points.

Previously, the dice controlled your character's fate when it came to ability scores, and you often you wound up with a rogue who looked like he dove into a shallow gene pool and chipped his two front teeth. 4th Edition is like creating a "designer baby"minus the controversy. Move over bad dice rolls, now there's something meatier: point buy! You start with six base numbers and get to improve them with points you can distribute where you like. I dumped a bunch into Intelligence and Wisdom, and then bumped up Charisma because someone has to sweet talk the minions. If you're the gambling type and don't want to mess with science, you can still leave it to the dice -- just start saving your gold now for braces and SAT prep classes.

Time to hit J.C. Wizards to do some spell shopping. Here's the part I always associate with the old-school way winners used to pick their prizes on *Wheel of Fortune*. "I'll take *magic missile* and *fireblast* for my at-will powers. Oh! *Burning hands* for an encounter power, and, let's see, *sleep* for my daily." (Sorry"no Service Merchandise gift certificates here. I asked.)

Moving on to skills I encouraged Tabitha to study up on Arcana, Insight, History and Diplomacy. Dungeoneering was enticing but sounded too much like something people who burst through open rooftop doors would learn, so I balked. Baby steps, people!

You don't want to cut a tiefling off in traffic because it doesn't take much to get the internal furnace lit. I can relate after taking an accidental foot to the head in kickboxing class by Mr. Bart Carroll. Had I been a tiefling, I would have gotten an attack bonus when I retaliated by sucker punching him in the kidney while he was waiting in line for coffee. Hellfire blood is also a racial freebie (anger management anyone?) and if that weren't badass enough, I got to choose one more feat at 1st level. Perhaps Ferocious Rebuke, which pushes your enemy back one square after taking a hit? Couple that bad boy with my infernal wrath and Bart would still be picking biscotti crumbs out of his pores. Tempting, but after fretting over Astrid all those times, I choose Toughness.

Maybe it's because I've gone through this process before, but Tabitha was born remarkably quick. In a 2-hour private coaching session with New DM, my disdainful, elitist character was playmat ready. I know what you're thinking"*2 hours is an improvement*? Sure, you could have written an entire campaign and ran through it twice in that time, but for me, this is super warp speed. I remember spending what seemed like days (Okay, it was. Three to be exact.) with Teddy hunched over the *Player's Handbook* asking every 23 seconds "What are you doing now?" "What's this number?" "Can I roll that again? She's so weak she couldn't lift a finger." I subscribe to the crock-pot school of character building, preferring to stew over every skill, feat, spell and even my alignment. My fellow party members are of the convection oven variety, taking only about 20 minutes, by themselves, to conceive their characters. When I'm all done, I'm chock full of hellish, ferocious, infernal wrath. Yep, no way can I get attached to Tabitha. She'd probably turn her rage on *me* if I dared.

At our first session with the new characters, it's odd, looking around the table at the familiar faces of my friends with their fresh-faced new characters. It's like the first day of preschool where all the parents smile and drink coffee while their kids pull each other's hair and write swear words in pink chalk on the blackboard. (You did it too. Admit it.) I'm used to Scott playing a ranger so I keep asking him things like "what kind of footprints are those?"

"How the heck should I know"his eladrin rogue answers.

And now Adam, who could kill off more maladroit rogues in one campaign than Jack Bauer could in an entire season of 24, is playing a short-in-stature, tall-in-brawn halfling warlock. It's weird.

"I think we should wear *Hello, my name is* tags"I suggest.

"I think you should have homework"New DM says.

In exchange for bonus experience points, we were tasked with writing our characters' backstories, complete with promises made and broken and how we ended up adventuring with at least one member of the group. This I can do, as I can gleefully give a rich history to any object"animate or otherwise.

Tabitha, a self-taught wizard, learned her craft just to spite her slothful mother and villainous, underhanded, fur-trading (sometimes that of Tabitha's pets!) father. And she's darn near the most well-adjusted of this bunch. Her party includes a rogue who vowed never to steal after getting busted swiping weapons at school, an avenging elf determined to reclaim his family's woods from the orcs who drove them out, and an ex-carnival kid who was lured away as a youth by a mysterious human teenage girl. Right. Like *that* ever happens. Odd that Astrid never knew much about her old gang"maybe because they died off so quickly trying to save her.

New DM won't let Tabitha have a familiar yet (just like my mom wouldn't let me have a dog) so I gave her a failed "show bear" named Oso de la Fez (just like I gave myself an imaginary German Shepard named Woofie). She and Teemu, the honest rogue, sprung Oso from a burlesque troop. New DM said it's fine because none of the other players can actually see Oso. Again reality merges with fantasy. Or would that be fantasy merging with reality? Or fantasy merging with fantasy? Whatever.

The other day I was running stairs alone, and lo and behold, the roof door was open. Thinking about Tabitha, I walked through it, figuring that's what she'd do. So I may fall off or through or get clubbed and hogtied by a witch"big whoop! And then I heard voices, which made me remember I don't actually know how to cast *fireblast*, so I beat it the hell out of there. Now that I think about it, Tabitha would have done the same thing. Why? Because it's not her job to lead the troops into battle and she's okay with that. More importantly: I'm her mother and I said so.

So much for baby steps.

About the Author

***Shelly Mazzanoble**'s mother claims her daughter has been over-protecting inanimate objects and imaginary friends for most of her life. Once, she alleges, Shelly was inconsolable when her mother threw away her old bathrobe (Terry) and even gave herself a 7 hour bout with hiccups after crying over the thought of Monster with the Glasses having to eat peas and carrots (which he hates!). Shelly would like to remind everyone her mother is the same woman who wants to make a bumper sticker that says, "Back off or my granddaughter will magic missile your honor student."*

The Fine Art of D&D Monogamy

by Shelly Mazzanoble
11/14/2007

Confessions Archive
Dragon 361

Does your Dungeon Master call you by another wizard's name? Does your cleric always seem to heal you last? Is your rogue's chainmail extra shiny? The signs are all there.

Your D&D party is cheating on you.

Seventy-five percent of **Dungeons & Dragons** players have multiple groups they play in. Okay that number is entirely made up but I didn't have time to do a formal market research study. What I did do was ask around the office and came up with a *really high percentage* of **D&D** players who have multiple **D&D** partners. A *really high percentage*! Have these people no respect for the sanctity of the party?

I'm not totally naive. I know members of my party have been two-timing me or (gasp!) still playing in other groups. (This is what the rest of *Duran Duran* must have felt like when Andy and John ran off with the *Power Station*.) Adam has played with friends outside of work for years so if anything, they're the ones who should feel slighted by the new, younger, fresher group he moonlights with. Scott was coerced into another group, but that was playtesting so I don't count that ¦ not to mention we were on a break when it happened. And Marty -- that commitment-phobe! He's the epitome of a player player, subscribing to the "open gaming relationship" theory. And he's a bi-player -- DM'ing and PC'ing depending on the group. He's got two games going at work (including ours) and two others outside of work. That's four **D&D** groups, in case you're counting. FOUR. I have no idea how he has time for all of this, let alone how he keeps us all straight. The first time he calls me by another wizard's name, it's over.

I knew Teddy, our old DM, was doing double duty. In addition to our group, he DM'ed another group at work. We referred to them as *The Wednesday Group*.

According to Teddy, those overachieving sewer rats were a level ahead of us because they had less table talk, made quicker decisions, and got through more than one encounter per session because they didn't treat their characters like tiny, newborn bluebirds perched on dainty tree branches. Man, what a snoozefest they must have been. What Teddy was really saying was The Wednesday Group was bor-ing, but he was too much of a gentleman to come out with it.

I tried to be mature about Teddy's fling and give him his space, figuring he'd have his fun and be over it. The real kicker came when a television crew wanted to come by and film a **D&D** game. When they saw how much fun we were having, we'd no doubt be asked to star in our own pilot. I could hardly wait! Monday rolled around and we sat in our usual spots around the table in our finest threads. Our hands -- perched on the table in front of us -- made us look more like kids in Sunday school rather than coworkers about to embark on a journey through the wilds of Khorvaire. This, coupled with our demure attitudes and softly articulated commands, such as "I'd like to take out my longsword and stab the offending party in the gut," gave Teddy pause.

"What's wrong with you guys?" he asked.

"We don't want to look bad on TV," Adam answered.

"Yeah," Linae answered. "We're practicing."

"Where is the crew anyway?" Scott asked.

"And where's craft services?" I asked. "I'm starving."

Teddy's laugh was vociferous -- the kind that made cartoon characters look windblown. We half expected tumbleweeds and cows to whiz by our heads. He was practically doubled over and had trouble catching his breath.

Scott rushed to help him.

"If you want to be on TV," he said between hiccups, "You'll need to be here on Wednesday."

Scott returned to his seat.

Oh ha ha. Funny, Teddy! *Be here Wednesday*? Like we're *understudies*? Why not just come home late one night reeking like The Wednesday Group and tell us how bad we would look in high definition. Why not just turn us all into NPCs and let your other group off us one by one? What did they have that we didn't have, Teddy?

Undeniably, my trust had been compromised, but now that I have a new DM I'm looking for a fresh start. Fortunately, my fellow party members don't flaunt their **D&D** discretions. Scott never talks about it because he signed an NDA. Adam hardly talks about his other friends, and when he does it's usually in regards to some peripheral event that happened while he was playing. Marty, surprisingly, has become so adept at polygamous play, I've never heard him mention his other 43 groups unless provoked. Once, I caught him sneaking back to his desk on a Friday afternoon, probably assuming everyone had left for the day. When I asked him what he was still doing

there he answered sheepishly, "I need to get more minis," which is really not a weird response for just about any question asked at Wizards.

"What are you doing in the supply cabinet?"

I need to get more minis.

"Do you want to go to lunch?"

Sure. I need to get more minis.

"Did you have a good weekend?"

Nope. I need to get more minis.

It wasn't until I saw the telltale blue and green dry-erase smudges on his fingers that I realized where he was taking those minis.

"Right here in the building, Marty?"

"Yep. Same room even."

Ouch! The nerve, bringing them into our room. I wonder who's sitting in my chair? Who's throwing a *magic missile* at those minis of his? Is she higher level than me? Does she know how to use a crossbow and a longsword? Oh Marty, what you do to a girl's elf esteem!

It occurred to me that maybe I'm the one the missing out here. Aren't we all after experience points anyway? Playing in several games would allow you to try out many different characters. And you'd probably be a savvier player if you were facing three times as many encounters. You might even say polygamous play is an asset to every party. As long as you didn't take rations from one group to feed the other, maybe having multiple partners isn't such a no-no.

I didn't have time to form a new side group before my next game, so I just eliminated that step. I invented the ultimate **D&D** super group. My side dish is so bad ass, they're ¦ unbelievable. By the time Tuesday rolled around, my imaginary super group and I had been storming castles for years.

At our next session, New DM was writing notes on the whiteboard. He brought homemade hummus and pita today, which my first loves were happily digging into.

"Bret, my *other* cleric, makes the best hummus," I said, testing the waters. No response.

¦*partners acting distant*¦

"He makes his own pitas too," I added. Still nothing.

¦*indifference*¦*disengaged*¦

I let it slide as New DM picked up where we left off. The whole party was bottlenecked in some hallway leading into what looks like the hobgoblin prom and we were about to crash it. Somehow Tara, my wizard, was at the helm.

"Look at the muscles on Tara," Scott says. "Has she been drinking?"

"Maybe she thought this was a general admission Bon Jovi concert," Marty says, which sets half the group off in laughter and the rest of us -- okay me -- into a wobbly rendition of *Living on a Prayer*. How apropos.

"Roll for initiative," New DM says.

"My other DM likes to say, â€˜roll for initiative, *please*,'" I say.

"That's nice," New DM says. "What'd you roll?"

Really now -- could these people be that thick? Maybe I actually *should* be cheating on them. Finally Scott takes the bait.

"Are you talking about Teddy?" he asks. "Man, get over it. He's not coming back."

¦*prone to lashing out?* ¦*Playing the victim*¦*?*

"Not Teddy," I shout. "Murray."

"You don't have another DM," Adam says. "I rolled a 12."

"Uh huh," I say, taking a nice big bite of pita. "I rolled a 15."

"Liar," Scott says. "16."

¦*easily provoked*¦*making false accusations*¦*?*

"Name them," Marty commands in the same tone Vera, his cleric, demands we heal ourselves.

Do you ever kill time between your turns by stacking all your dice on top of one another? Just when you're about to top it off with a d4 cherry, the whole thing caves in on itself? Well, that's me under pressure. I wasn't expecting the interrogation and I kind of crumbled.

"Umm ¦ there's Jemaine. He's the ranger. And ¦ Eugene ¦ our rogue."

"Don't forget Dave and Mel, your familiars," New DM says with a laugh, but his no-show dimples can't belie the hurt of my betrayal. Well too bad! I'm a woman scorned so I hit him where it hurts.

"Murray smells like papaya and chocolate," I blurt out. "Best. Smell. Ever." He tries to hide it, but I see him flinch.

"Are you sure he doesn't smell like kiwi and chocolate?" he fires back apparently knowing how to hit *me* where it hurts.

All right. **D&D** is about fantasy but maybe playing with your imaginary celebrity friends isn't the right idea. Besides, my heart can't take obsessing over the safety of more than one character.

I managed to get Tara out of the bottleneck relatively unscathed. My pride, on the other hand, needed some healing. Just as I was about to accept the fact that committing to just one party simply wasn't in our nature, I ran into Madeline from the Wednesday Group.

"You guys are so lucky to be playing **D&D** again," she said.

I agreed. Have I mentioned how much fun 4th Edition is? Sorry, Madeline.

"Why don't you ask our New DM to run a game for you guys?" I suggested. If you can't fix them, might as well fix them up.

"We did," she sighed, "but he declined. Said he was already committed and didn't want to take the focus off your group."

Oh wow. New DM has had offers to spread his hummus around? From the soon-to-be Emmy-nominated Wednesday Group, no less. And he declined?

Experience may be the best teacher, but it doesn't make you the best player. Polygamy might work for some, but apparently New DM and I had something in common. We were both saving ourselves for "the one."

About the Author

When not playing D&D with her new super-group, **Shelly Mazzanoble** picks up litter, rescues kittens from trees, recycles, candy-stripes, flosses, conserves energy, saves baby seals, and donates to every charity that sends her pre-addressed address labels. She hasn't cheated on anything since an 8th grade chemistry test and this bio.

DESIGN & DEVELOPMENT

Critical Hits

It's Beginning to Look a Lot Like Crit-Mas

by Logan Bonner
Art by Beth Trott
01/04/2008

Design & Development Archive
Dragon 361

The Design & Development *article series premiered on the **D&D** website back in September 2005, and has been a staple ever since. With the approach of 4th Edition, and our designers and developers focused on the new edition, this column will be the primary vehicle for 4th Edition coverage. We'll not only give you peeks at what's forthcoming, but also the "how" and "why".*

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To score a critical hit in 4th Edition D&D, do the following:

Roll 20.

Simple enough, right? Just one number to remember. And more importantly, just one roll.

Yes, the confirmation roll is gone. So why did we get rid of it? Because we, like so many players, had rolled crits only to have the confirmation roll miss. And we didn't like it. We don't think that many people did. (I look forward to reading the posts of people who disagree.) Having one roll is faster, and it's more fun. It keeps the excitement of the 20, and ditches the disappointment of the failure to confirm.

Critical Damage

Here's the part that's going to take some getting used to: Critical hits don't deal double damage. This changed because doubling everything 5% of the time led to some pretty crazy spikes that were very unpredictable.

Let's say you roll a crit with a power that deals 1d10+4 normally. So the crit deals 2d10+8. The next turn, the monster attacks you using a power that deals 3d6+4 damage. He crits, dealing 6d6+8. Between the extra dice and the doubled ability modifier, that's a pretty huge difference! (And a pretty painful one.)

Instead, when you roll a critical hit, all the dice are maximized. So your 1d10+4 power deals 14 damage and the monster's 3d6+4 deals 22. Generally speaking, randomness is more of an advantage to monsters than PCs. More predictable critical damage keeps monsters from insta-killing your character.

Having maximized dice also helps out when you have multitarget attacks. You'll roll an attack roll against each target, so maximized dice keep you from needing to roll a bunch of dice over and over -- you can just write your crit damage on your character sheet for quick reference.

Beefing Up Your Crits

PCs also have some extra tricks up their sleeves to make their criticals better. Magic weapons (and implements for magical attacks) add extra damage on crits. So your +1 frost warhammer deals an extra 1d6 damage on a critical hit (so your crit's now up to 14+1d6 damage in the example above). Monsters don't get this benefit, so PC crits outclass monster crits most of the time.

Crits can be improved in a couple of other ways. Weapons can have the high crit property, giving extra dice on a crit. Like this:

Weapon	Prof.	Damage	Range	Cost	Weight	Category	Properties
War pick	2	d8	--	15 gp	6 lb.	Pick	High crit, versatile

In addition, some powers and magic items have extra effects on a hit. So crits are doing just fine without all those dice.

Crits in Play

In playtest, it does seem like critical hits come up more often. The subtitle of this article is stolen from Chris Tulach, who sings a bit of, "It's Beginning to Look a Lot Like Crit-mas" whenever the natural 20s come out to play. Fortunately, hit points are higher, especially at low levels, so there's a bigger buffer to keep those crits from killing people too quickly. It still feels great to roll one, but the fight goes on.

We've tried to corral the numbers but keep the feel that a critical hit is a special event. So grab your d20 and your big, nasty magic axe, and get ready to crit for the fences!

About the Author

Logan Bonner joined Wizards of the Coast as in 2006 as an editor on **Dungeons & Dragons**. He had no experience in the industry prior to joining WotC, and marvels that his clever ruse has lasted this long. After doing some class design work for 4th Edition on the side, he joined the mechanical design team. His previous editing products include *Magic Item Compendium* and *Monster Manual V*, and he wrote about half of *Eberron Survival Guide*, which releases in March '08.

Elite Bulette

by Peter Schaefer
art by Todd Lockwood
12/11/2007

Design & Development Archive
Dragon 361

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The earth quivers. The ground furrows. Turning earth knocks heroes from their feet, and a mated pair of mighty bulettes bursts into their midst.

All granite-hard hide, characteristic fins, and below-ground tactics, the bulette has been a staple of **D&D** since the early days. Fourth Edition continues to do it honor by making it an elite monster.

Elite Monsters

Elite monsters represent a greater challenge: They count as two monsters of their level for encounter building and rewards. Elite monsters have the word "elite" preceding their level and role.

Here's how a fight against a pair of such beasts might go:

- The bulettes are underground using their burrowing movement. Even though the PCs can hear the creatures (a bulette isn't exactly stealthy), they can't attack until the bulettes rise to the surface.
- When the bulettes go, they go mean. The first burrows shallowly through the earth under the fighter and rogue - the fighter keep his feet, but the rogue falls down and makes a good target. The bulette leaves the ground to take advantage of this and bites the poor fellow, doing some serious damage.
- Bulette number two uses the same opening gambit but knocks over both the cleric and the wizard, who were next to each other. It opts to burst from the ground in a spray of packed dirt and stone. The prone heroes are easier to hit and take more damage from the wave of rocks. The fighter is also in range of the burst, but he brushes the soil aside with his shield.
- The party gets to act. The rogue rises. He's not in a position to flank, but he can still try to do some damage. He doesn't like the look of the bulette's heavy armor, so he tries to slip his short sword between two stony plates before the bulette can react and he draws blood.
- The wizard's in a bad spot. He probably can't lay down an attack without provoking an opportunity attack or burning his allies, so he delays. Good thing, because the cleric places fear in the bulette's tiny mind, which doesn't offer much resistance. The bulette burrows away, taking an opportunity attack from the cleric before he gets underground (avoiding like attacks from the fighter and the rogue.
- This gives the wizard the chance to stand and cover the bulette's space with crackling lightning -- the monster's bulk means it doesn't have much chance to evade the blast and it doesn't. The fighter follows with a good, old-fashioned heavy sword swing and gets lucky: a critical hit. The bulette isn't looking good (it's bloodied), but now it gets to act.
- Bulette number one dives into the earth so rapidly that the heroes around it don't get opportunity attacks. Safely in the ground, it heals some damage and then burrows under the heroes, who are now clustered close enough that the bulette can affect them all. Bulette number two follows by burrowing back into the action and bursting from the ground to rain more rocks down on the party, reminding them all that it's time for some healing.

The battle goes on. Even though there are four heroes, it only takes two bulettes to give them a run for their money. Fourth Edition has such elite monsters because you don't always want a straight one-on-one fight -- sometimes a monster should just be bigger, tougher, and scarier than the norm.

About the Author

By night, **Peter Schaefer** drives his armor-plated, solar wind-powered tank through the ranks of the evil yak-men who fight to crush all that right-thinking humans hold dear. His only ally and secret sponsor in this vigilantism is Griselda, the Heirophant Mercurial who supports Peter with high-tech toys and subtle magics from her position within the secret world government in Taipei. Decipher his rebellious code here and join the fight!

Feats

by Andy Collins
11/26/2007

Design & Development Archive
Dragon 361

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One of the most useful and popular additions to **Dungeons & Dragons** that appeared in 3rd Edition was the concept of **feats**: special bonuses, benefits, or actions that characters could acquire outside their normal class features.

Throughout the lifespan of the edition (and even between the covers of the *Player's Handbook*), the potency, utility, effect, and coolness of feats have varied widely.

Some feats offer utilitarian but unexciting benefits, while others grant characters entire new options in combat. It's hard to argue with the utility of Alertness, Improved Initiative, Weapon Focus, or even (for 1st-level wizards and sorcerers) Toughness, but that same feat slot could purchase Power Attack, Rapid Shot, Spring Attack, or Empower Spell.

When we started talking about feats for 4th Edition, we already knew that we wanted the bulk of a character's powers - ”the exciting actions he performs in combat - ”to come from his class. Even character classes that hadn't traditionally offered class-based power options (that is, non-spellcasters) would now acquire these special attacks, defenses, maneuvers, and so on directly from their class's list of such abilities.

Once that decision was made, a lot of the most exciting feats suddenly looked more like class-based powers. Spring Attack, for example, now looked an awful lot like a power for the rogue or melee-based ranger, rather than a feat that just anybody could pick up. Manyshot, Whirlwind Attack, Two-Weapon Fighting, Shot on the Run - ”these were specialized powers appropriate for particular character archetypes.

So what design space did that leave for feats? After some discussion, we came to see feats as the fine-tuning that your character performed after defining his role (via your choice of class) and his build (via your power selections). Feats would let characters further specialize in their roles and builds, as well as to differentiate themselves from other characters with similar power selections.

They would accomplish these goals with simple, basic functionality, rather than complicated conditional benefits or entirely new powers that you'd have to track alongside those of your class.

Here are four examples of feats taken from the latest draft of the 4th Edition *Player's Handbook*. The first two demonstrate the minor evolution of familiar favorites from 3rd Edition, while the other two show off some new tricks. As always, nothing's final until you read it in the printed book, so take these with a grain of salt.

Toughness
Tier: Heroic
Benefit: When you take this feat, you gain additional hit points equal to your level + 3. You also gain 1 additional hit point every time you gain a level.

Alertness
Tier: Heroic
Benefit: You don't grant enemies combat advantage in surprise rounds.
You also gain a +2 feat bonus to Perception checks.

First Reaction
Tier: Paragon

Benefit: If you are surprised, you may spend an action point to act during the surprise round.

Golden Wyvern Adept
Tier: Paragon
Benefit: You can omit a number of squares from the effects of any of your area or close wizard powers. This number can't exceed your Wisdom modifier.

About the Author

Andy Collins works as the system design and development manager for **D&D** at Wizards of the Coast. His development credits include the *Player's Handbook* v.3.5, *Races of Eberron*, and *Dungeon Master's Guide II*. He is also one of the lead designers for 4th Edition **D&D**, along with Rob Heinsoo and James Wyatt.

Inn-Fighting Designer's Notes

by Rob Heinsoo
11/09/2007

Design & Development Archive
Dragon 361

First Punch

I wanted to design a tavern brawl game ever since I was a wee lad. I usually pictured the results as something like a miniatures game-maybe something like an early minigame I read about but never played from *White Dwarf* magazine, or something like Yaquinto's *Swashbuckler*, in which pirates and musketeers circle each other while throwing mugs and flipping tables.

But when Mat Smith mentioned that he wanted to design a tavern brawl game a couple years ago, I started thinking about something on a different track. After all, **D&D** already handles round-by-round character-vs.-character action. Any game that was too close to **D&D**'s level of play would have to account for a lot of the same character and world elements that **D&D** handles.

So I decided on a more abstract game. All the good parts of a tavern brawl show up in character abilities (hiding under tables, backstabbing, surprise attacks from hand crossbows) or attack actions (hit 'em with a chair, punch 'em in the kisser, zap 'em with an eldritch blast) or special actions (prove you're tough by taking a drink in the middle of the brawl). You win by doing a lot of damage to the other characters, not by surviving longest-if your Adventurer gets knocked out, you'll lose a few victory points but still get to throw another Adventurer into the mix, so no one ever gets completely knocked out of the game.

Inn-Fighting Ain't *Three-Dragon Ante*

Despite appearances, *Inn-Fighting* is not a sequel to *Three-Dragon Ante*. The two games are packaged the same, cost the same, and have the same designer's name on the cover. But thematically, they're not much alike.

Three-Dragon Ante rewards long-term strategy. Yeah, there's a lot of luck in the game, but if you're inclined, you can increase your prospects by weighing the multiple possible approaches to each hand/gambit, and how those approaches will set you up for success in future hands.

Inn-Fighting isn't like that. Long term strategizing usually isn't in the cards, and it's definitely not in the dice. If you keep track of all the possibilities offered by your action cards, you'll have a better chance of avoiding silly mistakes...but I wouldn't exactly call that 'stragety,' as we like to say in the Wizards office. *Inn-Fighting* delivers beer'n'pretzels whackiness, with one face on the die actually showing a mug of ale!

Inn-Fighting Strategy

True, I just said that long-term strategizing isn't what *Inn-Fighting* is about, but that was in comparison to *Three-Dragon Ante*. There are a couple of related strategies that I do try to keep track of.

It's About the Lead: When you take the lead in the game, you become target #1. Special powers target you, and Ale actions drink away your victory points.

Occasionally, if I have two options for scoring victory points, I choose the option that looks good but doesn't look likely to put me in the lead. The variability of scoring from low or high damage attacks means that I often as not get it wrong, but there are some games when I've been able to float just under the danger ceiling until I have the chance to win.

Staying Alive May Not be the Answer: If you're about to be knocked out by a player who won't win the game by knocking you out, and everyone else will win the game by knocking you out, you might end up better off *not* spending a precious defensive action card to stay alive. Take the embarrassment of getting knocked out by someone else who isn't winning yet, lose the victory points for having your Adventurer knocked out, and hope that your next Adventurer has better luck.

Similarly, even early in the game, you may look at the situation on the table and realize that your Adventurer is singularly unsuited to compete with the bruisers the opposition is throwing at you. You never get to turn your nose up at successful defense rolls that keep you from getting knocked out; however, if you judge that your current Adventurer doesn't have the firepower to keep up with the rest of the table, you might avoid playing defensive action cards altogether, in order to save them for an Adventurer who *does* have a chance to do some real damage.

Tactics

These tricks don't qualify as strategies, but they might help.

Special Actions May Not Be the Answer Either: Don't be too quick to snatch up the dice when it's your turn and you've got 3 Luck or 3 Ale showing. Every once in a while, there's a particular attack you really need to score a lot of points or to win the game, and that attack is showing next to the Luck or Ale. You may not get the same attack when you reroll the Brawl Dice after taking your Special Action, so it can be worth considering whether you value the chance to make the right attack more than drawing a card or drinking victory points.

Drink Your Own Health: If you're in the lead when it's your turn and there are 3 or more Ale showing, you're often better off drinking away your own victory points to prevent the next opponent from doing the drinking. Most people keep track of that when they are down hit points and can actually use the healing, but sometimes you'll want to drink your own victory points away just to prevent the next opponent from healing using your VP.

Helmdar, Dwarf Fighter
HP: 10
Skill: 11+
Knockout Bonus: 4 VP
1 OR 3 damage
2 OR 4 damage
Cleave (2 OR 4 damage; if the attack Knocks Out the target, make another attack that deals 2 OR 4 damage to any target)
Defense Die
OR
Armor (Reduce attack damage by 2)
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Regrets, I Have a Couple

Most everyone asks me whether the damage that your Bystanders inflict with their defense dice goes into your victory points. Yes it does, and I'm sorry the rules aren't clear about that. *All* damage that your characters do to other characters goes into your victory points. Damage inflicted by your Bystanders isn't going to be enough to win you the game, because even if that damage got you above 20 victory points, you'd still have to damage an Adventurer on your turn. I can't tell you how many times I've had 23 or 25 victory points and still managed to lose the game because I haven't been able to damage an Adventurer on my turn.

My other regret is that the action card Second Swing has a typo. It shouldn't be talking about rerolling the Brawl Dice you used for the attack; it should say "Reroll the d20 you used to make the attack.â€› In other words, you play Second Swing when you've rolled a 1 on your attack roll, or rolled low damage when what you need is to roll high.

The Iron Dwarf Variant

This variant can result in a much longer game. If you'd rather play one long game instead of two or three short games, try this out: Instead of awarding victory immediately to the player who' scored at least 20 victory points and has damaged an opposing Adventurer on their turn, wait and award victory to such a player at the start of their next turn if they still have 20 or more victory points. This gives every opponent a chance to knock out the Adventurer who' about to win.

The Design Your Own Adventurer Option

If you've picked up the game, you've probably noticed the card that promises you can come to our website and find out how to add your **D&D** PC to the game as an Adventurer. That feature isn't up and running yet, and it's my fault. My original idea of how to handle the conversion was stupid and wasn't going to work. Luckily, Logan Bonner had a better idea a week ago and is putting together the basics of his approach, so we'll have something tinkered together for you soon!

About the Author

Rob Heinsoo was born in the Year of the Dragon. He started playing D&D in 1974 with the original brown box. More recently, he designed *Three-Dragon Ante*, *Inn-Fighting*, and a couple incarnations of the D&D Miniatures skirmish system. He's the lead designer of 4th Edition and captains the D&D mechanical design team.

Magic Item Levels

by Andy Collins
art by William O'Conner
12/03/2007

Design & Development Archive
Dragon 361

The Design & Development *article series premiered on the **D&D** website back in September 2005, and has been a staple ever since. With the approach of 4th Edition, and our designers and developers focused on the new edition, this column will be the primary vehicle for 4th Edition coverage. We'll not only give you peeks at what's forthcoming, but also the"how" and "why."*

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The *Magic Item Compendium* introduced the concept of levels for magic items. This primarily served to help DMs determine what magic items to place in a treasure hoard (or to give to his NPCs). Since we built that level system around the existing magic item prices, it was an imperfect solution (for instance, a few non-epic magic items exceeded the pricing scheme for level 1-20 items).

Fourth Edition D&D improves that useful tool by explicitly linking a magic item's level to its price. For example, all 9th-level magic items now cost the same number of gp to craft or to purchase. This makes it even easier to gauge a magic item's appropriateness for your game at a glance. Don't know if it's OK to drop a *flying carpet* into the hands of your 9th-level PCs? Well, the fact that the carpet's listed as an 18th-level item should clue you in that it'd have an enormous impact on your 9th-level game.

Does that mean that all magic items of the same level will be equal in power? Well, yes and no.

It's true that the designer of two different 9th-level magic items imagines that they'd have a roughly equivalent impact on gameplay. A *+2 thundering mace* and a *+2 staff of the war mage*, if designed and developed properly, should be equally useful in combat. That comparison generally isn't too hard, since the basic functions and utility of combat-based effects remain relative regardless of the weapon or implement. How much extra damage does the mace deal compared to the staff? If damage isn't involved, how useful and potent are the items' effects against foes? And so on.

However, that comparison quickly becomes more art than science when comparing magic items of different purposes. (This, by the way, is why relying on hard-and-fast pricing rules for magic items is troublesome at best, and actively bad for your game at worst.) After all, most magic items only "compete" with other items in a narrow category for a character's attention, so comparing their values can be quite tricky.

For example, if a *rope of climbing* and a *+2 flaming longsword* are both 10th-level magic items (and thus both cost the same number of gold pieces), that's not quite the same thing as saying that a *rope of climbing* is as powerful as that weapon. After all, it's unlikely that a character has to decide between those two items -- they serve fundamentally different purposes.

It's much more likely that a character interested in a *rope of climbing* will compare its price to other items that let him overcome similar obstacles (such as the 7th-level *slippers of spider climbing* or the 13th-level *boots of levitation*).

Alternatively, if he's in the market for a new weapon, he would compare the value of that *+2 flaming sword* with the more expensive *+3 vicious sword* (12th level), or the slightly cheaper *+2 lightning sword* (9th level).

What the designer is saying, rather, is that he imagines that the effect of both the rope of climbing and the *+2 flaming sword* are appropriate for characters around 10th level. A few levels before that, either item would have a much more significant impact on gameplay (possibly by making certain spells or powers of the characters obsolete). More than a few levels after that, either item will have lost a lot of its luster -- maybe because more characters have easy access to levitation, flight, or even short-range teleportation

effects, in the case of the *rope of climbing*, or because they're all toting around +3 or better weapons, making the flaming sword seem underpowered.

Ultimately, assigning levels to magic items sends a message to players and DMs: *Here's when this item is most appropriate for your game*. Once that information is in your hands, of course, it's up to you to use it as best befits your game!

About the Author

Andy Collins works as the system design and development manager for **D&D** at Wizards of the Coast. His development credits include the *Player's Handbook* v.3.5, *Races of Eberron*, and *Dungeon Master's Guide II*. He is also one of the lead designers for 4th Edition **D&D**, along with Rob Heinsoo and James Wyatt.

Paladin Smites

by Stephen Radney-MacFarland
11/28/2007

Design & Development Archive
Dragon 361

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Smite -- since before 900 CE this word or some very similar Old or Middle English ancestor has meant, "That's going to leave a mark." In the first two editions of **Dungeons & Dragons**, smite was merely an interesting word used by folks laying down the smack. In my formative gaming years, a player of mine named Erol used to call his halfling paladin's reversed *cure light wounds*, smites. (Actually he was just a post-*Unearthed Arcana* fighter/cleric, but he called the character a paladin -- I was not farsighted enough just to let him play a paladin.) I think he just liked yelling "I smite the foul beast!" in that annoying high-pitched kid voice he used to play Sir Lore. (Yes, that's Erol's own name spelled backward in true high-Gygaxian fashion).

With the release of 3rd Edition, Erol's wildest dreams came true. Not only were halflings allowed to be true paladins, smite officially entered the paladin's toolbox. Sure, it was once a day. Sure, it wasn't nearly as good as you wanted it to be sometimes, but smites were promoted from verb to mechanic.

In 4th Edition, **D&D** smites really come into their own. Now a subset of the paladin's renewable (read, encounter-recharge) powers, smites allow a paladin to deliver a powerful blow with the character's weapon of choice, while layering on some divine effect (and I mean that in both meanings of the word) on allies or enemies. A divine defender, much of the paladin's smites are all about kicking the crap out of those they find anathema while ensuring that foes who want to hurt enemies have a harder time at it. Take, as exhibit one, safeguard smite:

Safeguard Smite
Paladin 1
Encounter - Weapon
Standard Action
Melee weapon
Target: One creature
Attack: Charisma vs. AC
Hit: 2x[W] + Cha.
Hit or Miss: An ally within 5 squares gains a bonus to AC equal to your Wisdom modifier until the end of your next turn.

This basic, entry-level smite has all the things a growing paladin needs to fulfill its role and lay down some hurt. A Charisma attack against the target's Armor Class, safeguard smite deals double her base weapon's damage plus her Charisma modifier in damage (paladins are a force of personality, after all), and grants a quick boost to an ally in trouble (including, in a pinch, the paladin herself). And there you have it. Your first smite -- simple, serviceable, and fun.

As your paladin progresses as a defender of the faith, smites, like all of your abilities, grow in power and utility. But unlike its defender cousin, the fighter, a paladin is more than just the guy who kicks butt and makes sure enemies focus (or want to focus) on him. Paladins have always been able to heal in some way and the 4th Edition variety is no different. Though this splash of leader flavor into the paladin's defender role comes in many forms, one of the more active and interesting ways that your paladin can come to the aid of a companion while fighting is our second example of a smite:

Renewing Smite
Paladin 13
Encounter - Healing, Weapon
Standard Action
Melee weapon
Target: One creature
Attack: Charisma vs. AC
Hit: 2x[W] + Cha damage and ally within 5 heals 10 + your Wisdom modifier damage.

You'll no doubt see the pattern between these two smites. They mix a fair portion of damage (scaled up by level, but not necessarily the amount of dice) while giving an ally a much needed boost of hit points at the most opportune moments. Selfish paladins (typically those who serve more self-centered gods or just the occasional egoist who venerates Pelor) can even heal themselves with the strike, as you're considered your own ally unless the effect of a power states otherwise.

Let's move on to smites that inhabit the levels over 20. Binding smite is another flavor of defender smite -- and as its high level demands, does the defender job more effectively, and thus more powerfully than the simple safeguard smite does.

Binding Smite
Paladin 27
Encounter - Weapon
Standard Action
Melee weapon
Target: One creature
Attack: Charisma vs. Will
Hit: 2x[W] + Wis damage and target cannot gain line of effect to anyone but you until the end of your next turn.

In binding smite you can see an example of how the effect of a smite goes up with level, while the numbers in their base form seem similar when not taking into account the accuracy and damage boosts that merely gaining levels (and having better weapons) affords. It just gets ¦ well, better. Heck, it's epic, after all, so it has to be good, and you don't have to have 4th Edition books in front of you to realize line of effect denial is good. When you're fighting balor, ancient blue dragons, and sorrowsworn, it had better be good -- those critters don't fool around!

There you have it; just a small taste of what your paladin smites will look like in 4th Edition. While I have lost touch with Erol over the years, I hope that come this summer, somewhere out there, Sir Lore will return - a halfling with a high-pitched voice, yelling, "I smite thee, foul miscreant." I imagine his DM will just wince and sigh, just like I did all those years ago.

About the Author

Born on a stormy Christmas day, in our nation's capital, during the Nixon administration, the stars were definitely wrong when **Stephen Radney-MacFarland** came screaming into the world. Spending most of his impressionable years as a vagabond and ne're-do-well, Stephen eventually settled in the Northwest to waste his life on roleplaying games.

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Quests

by James Wyatt
Art by William O'Conner
11/21/2007

Design & Development Archive
Dragon 361

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In **D&D**, the words "adventure" and "quest" are virtually synonymous. They both mean a journey, fraught with danger that you undertake for a specific purpose. We sometimes joke that the game is all about killing monsters and taking their stuff, but the reality is that the game is about adventures. You go into the dungeon and kill monsters with a larger purpose in mind: to stop their raids on caravans, to rescue the townsfolk they've captured, to retrieve the lost Scepter of the Adamantine Kings for the rightful descendant of those kings.

Quests are the story glue that binds encounters together into adventures. They turn what would otherwise be a disjointed series of combats and interactions into a narrative -- a story with a beginning, a middle, and a climactic ending. They give characters a reason for doing what they do, and a feeling of accomplishment when they achieve their goals.

Quests can be major or minor, they can involve the whole group or just a single character's personal goals, and they have levels just like encounters do. Completing a quest always brings a reward in experience points (equal to an encounter of its level for a major quest, or a monster of its level for a minor quest), and it often brings monetary rewards as well (on par with its XP reward, balanced with the rest of the treasure in the adventure). They can also bring other rewards, of course -- grants of land or title, the promise of a future favor, and so on.

The idea of quest rewards is nothing new to D&D. Second Edition, in particular, promoted the idea of giving story rewards of experience points when players completed adventures. The quest rules in 4th Edition are directly descended from that idea, integrated into the economy of rewards in the game. They're a rules wrapper around the story of the game, a way to keep players mindful of the purposes behind all their adventuring.

One of the suggestions in the 4th Edition *Dungeon Master's Guide* is to give players a visual, tactile representation of a quest as soon as they begin it. At the start of the adventure, after the baron has briefed the characters on their mission and been bullied into paying them more than he intended, you can hand the players an index card spelling out the details of the quest -- including the agreed-upon reward. In the middle of the adventure, when the characters find a key with a ruby set in its bow, you can hand them a card, telling them that finding the matching lock is a quest.

When the players have cards or some other visual representation of their quests, it's easy for them to remember what they're supposed to be doing -- and to sort out goals that might be contradictory. That's a really interesting ramification of the quest system: It's okay to give the players quests they don't complete, quests that conflict with each other, or quests that conflict with the characters' alignments and values.

For example, the mentor of the group's paladin might ask him to find and destroy the Ruby Tome of Savrith the Undying. At the same time, a shady character is offering the rogue a sizable sum in exchange for the same tome, and the wizard's research turns up a reference to a ritual contained in the Ruby Tome that the characters will need to use in order to complete another quest. Three quests stand at odds, and it's up to the players to decide what they want to do.

There's a story that's a lot richer and more interesting than simply going into the dungeon to see what treasure is there.

About the Author

James Wyatt is the Lead Story Designer for **D&D** and one of the lead designers of **D&D** 4th Edition. In over seven years at Wizards of the Coast, he has authored or co-authored award-winning adventures and settings including the *Eberron Campaign Setting*, *City of the Spider Queen*, and *Oriental Adventures*. His more recent works include *Expedition to Castle Ravenloft*, *Cormyr: The Tearing of the Weave*, and *The Forge of War*. His second Eberron novel, *Storm Dragon*, is in stores now.

The Importance of Terrain

by Stephen Radney-MacFarland
11/19/2007

Design & Development Archive
Dragon 361

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A proper command of terrain wins battles -- generals from Sun Tzu to Norman Schrwarzkopf have known this to be true. There's a similar relationship between encounter design and terrain -- a canny use of terrain can transform good encounters into great ones. One of the goals of the 4th Edition Dungeon Master's Guide is to help the Dungeon Master perform just such transformations, which includes providing a bunch of evocative terrain types and advice on their placement and use. Since the book doesn't come out for a while, let's illuminate some of the basics of terrain in 4th Edition **Dungeons & Dragons**.

While it might seem elementary, let's first examine what we mean by terrain. Terrain is not just what litters the field in an encounter; terrain also forms the dimensions and tactile experience of the encounter itself. Knowing that, there are some things about 4th Edition **D&D** design that you should keep in mind when building encounters.

First and foremost, not only does the standard 4th Edition encounter tend to have more combatants than in 3rd Edition, both PCs and monsters are more maneuverable as well. This means that the 10-foot by 10-foot rooms of yore have gone the way of the dinosaur (actually that happened in 3E, but that's not relevant to this discussion). Likewise have the 20 by 20 room and even the 30 by 30 room as the sole encounter areas. In fact, the *minimum* amount of space you typically want to have for a standard encounter is one of those large 10-square by 8-square dungeon tiles! That's 50-feet by 40-feet for all you still counting in feet. Just hold on before you start chucking all those 2-by-2 square dungeon tiles in the garbage -- you'll still need them!

Any DM worth her salt knows that dynamic and interactive stories are more satisfying than railroading narratives. The same is true for battle areas. Larger spaces with interesting terrain that both the PCs and their enemies can take advantage of -- or be foiled by -- is infinitely more fun than a small and relatively empty room that constrains combatant choice to a small set of dreary moves.

But here's the rub -- large areas of interconnecting chambers, complete with alcoves, galleries, and antechambers, are far more exciting than just plopping down a 10 by 8 tile and sprinkling it with rubble. Creating a network of interconnected areas creates numerous avenues of conflict and creates the possibilities for a series of evolving fronts that metamorphoses same-old encounters into tactical puzzles that'll sing like legend to a gaming group. See, you're going to need all those smaller pieces!

Then, once you have the main layout done, populate it with furniture, shrines, rubble, pillars, or maybe even the occasional lightning column or patch of doomspore where needed (and where appropriate), and you've got yourself a pretty vibrant encounter area for your combatants to interact with.

Oh, here's a bit of sound advice that'll keep you out of trouble. Be careful with pits and other steep inclines, and leave 100-foot (or endless) chasms for paragon- or epic-level play. Some of that increased maneuverability of the combatants in 4th Edition comes from attacks that can move foes against their will -- which is all fun and games until someone loses a character!

That aside, **D&D** is more than just a tactical skirmish game; it's also a game of storytelling and heroic adventure. When designing adventures, you're doing more than just placing interesting terrain pieces for the battle that (let's admit it) will most likely occur; you are also setting the stage of your story. A canny eye toward terrain set up can also help you communicate story elements to your players quickly and without the need to say a single word. Just put down some sarcophagi, and the players will know it's a crypt. Put down an altar, and you've just communicated that it's a temple. Put down piles and piles of bones in front of a yawning cavern, and the players will know their characters are likely in a world of trouble or you've seen *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* one too many times.

What the Heck is Doomspore?
Isn't it annoying when those know-it-all designers and developers drop an Easter egg in a preview article and don't back it up with any description? Yeah, I hate that too -- unless I am the one doing it. That said, I empathize a little, so here's the doomspore (or at least a recent version of it).

Doomspore (Any)
Usually found in large, natural caverns, this fungus takes the form of a clump of toadstools, some of which reach a height of about 3 feet tall. A square of doomspore is difficult terrain and provides cover to anyone standing within.

If any creature enters a doomspore's square (or uses a standard action to kick or poke at it, if within reach), a doomspore releases a cloud of spores that provides concealment to all creatures within its own and adjacent squares. Furthermore, a bloodied creature in the area of a cloud when created, who moves into the cloud, or begins its turn in the cloud, is subject to a Fortitude attack (+10) that deals 1d10 points of poison damage on a hit. In addition, a target hit by a doomspore is weakened and takes ongoing poison 5 (save ends both conditions; creatures with immunity to or resist poison 5 are immune to the weakened condition also).

This cloud (and its effects on a bloodied character) persists for the remainder of the encounter (or for 5 minutes). Once the cloud settles, the doomspore can't produce another for 24 hours.

Placement Advice: More than one doomspore in a room may give an advantage to creatures immune or resistant to poison. Intelligent undead tend to cultivate doomspore, and this debilitating fungus can often be found in caverns infested with zombies. It absolutely inundates areas of the Shadowfell as its growth thrives in the presence of undead flesh that has been shed from its host.

As for the lightning column -- well, you'll just have to wait for that one. I would say I am sorry but you know I'm not.

About the Author

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Design & Development

Traps!

by Stephen Radney-MacFarland
Art by Steven Belledin
01/04/2008

Design & Development Archive
Dragon 361

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Traps have been a part of the **Dungeons & Dragons** game since its earliest days, fiendish perils that stood right alongside monsters as primary hazards to adventurer life and limb. Some adventures, like the classic *Tomb of Horrors*, featured traps as the chief threat to life and appendage. Unfortunately, they've rarely had a positive effect on the game. In the early days, DMs all too often felt compelled to demonstrate their cleverness and punish players for making "wrong" choices -- even a choice as simple and random as which passage to explore. Old-school players in the hands of such a DM responded by changing their characters' approach to dungeon exploration. The "right" way to play the game was to slowly and laboriously search each 10-foot square of dungeon before you set foot on it, or to use magic that made traps completely pointless. Neither option was much fun.

By the time 3rd Edition rolled around, traps had become a much smaller part of the game, something you might run across once or twice in an adventure -- and rarely very satisfying when you did. Who wants to roll an endless series of mostly pointless Search checks? If the players decided to simply explore the dungeon and search for the "fun" and got whacked by a trap instead, they felt like they'd been sandbagged by the DM.

Consequently, we thought about simply "disappearing" traps from the game, but then we decided to take a shot at fixing them first. Making traps work *right* certainly offered some significant upside. Traps are a good way to showcase skills. They're a good way to introduce puzzle-solving into the occasional encounter. They're an excellent way to complicate an otherwise bland combat encounter and add a highly interesting hazard that players can exploit -- or must avoid. And sometimes it simply makes sense in the context of the story that the builders of a dungeon might have built a trap to guard something.

The first thing we did was spend more time and attention on traps as components of existing combat encounters, or as multi-component encounters in and of themselves. The Encounter Trap system described in the **Eberron** sourcebook *Secrets of Xen'drik* offered a great starting point. By treating a trap like a group of monsters with different components operating on different initiative scores, a trap became a real encounter rather than random damage. Most traps work best when they "replace" a monster in a combat encounter, or serve as a hazard equally threatening to both sides. We think that our ideal encounter consists of some of the PCs battling monsters while some PCs deal with a trap or similar hazard. Meanwhile, everyone on both sides of the battle must contend with some sort of interesting terrain element (although the advantage probably lies with the monsters there -- after all, this is their home). In this way, traps become an integral component of an encounter, rather than an afterthought or something a bored DM springs on unsuspecting PCs between fights.

The second significant change to traps in the game is changing the way we look at searching and exploring. Rather than requiring the players to announce when and where they were searching, we decided to assume that *all* characters are searching *everything* all the time. In other words, players don't need to say "I'm searching for secret doors," or "I'm searching for traps." Instead, characters have a

passive Perception score that represents their Take-10 result for searching. When something hidden is in the area, the DM compares the passive Perception scores of the PCs with the DCs of the various hidden things in the area. In the case of hidden creatures, the DC is the result of their Stealth check. For things like hidden traps, hazards, or secret doors, the DC is usually static.

While Perception is usually the most important skill when it comes to sussing out a trap, it's not the only skill useful in determining the danger of traps. Based on the nature of the trap, skills such as Arcana, Dungeoneering, or even Nature can give a PC the ability to learn of the existence of a trap, figure out its workings, or even find a way to counter it.

Lastly, we wanted to expand the ways in which you could counter a trap. Much like figuring out that sometimes you wanted other skills to allow a character to recognize a trap's threat, we made an effort to design traps that could be countered with an interesting skill uses. Sometimes we're pointing out what should be obvious, such as that an Acrobatics check can be used to jump over a pit; other times we're going to expand the uses of some skills with opportunistic exceptions, like granting a skill check that gives the characters insight on how a trap acts and ascertain something about its attack pattern.

Don't fret, rogue fans. That class and other characters trained in Thievery are still the party's best hope to shut down traps quickly and well. The goal was to make traps something that could be countered when a party lacks a rogue or the rogue is down for the count, not to mention make traps more dynamic and fun. In doing this, we quickly came to the realization that canny players, in a flash of inspiration, can come up with interesting solutions to counter even the most detailed traps. Instead of trying to anticipate these flashes though design, we give you, the DM, the ability to react to player insight with a host of tools and general DCs that allow you to say "Yes, you can do that, and here's how." We think this is a better approach than shutting down good ideas from the players for interesting story and challenge resolution, simply because you lack the tools to interpret their actions. After all, you should have the ability to make the changes on the fly that reward interesting ideas and good play. This is one of the components of every **Dungeons & Dragons** game that allow each session to be a fun and unique experience. Traps, like all things in the game, should embrace that design philosophy.

About the Author

Born on a stormy Christmas day, in our nation's capital, during the Nixon administration, the stars were definitely wrong when **Stephen Radney-MacFarland** came screaming into the world. Spending most of his impressionable years as a vagabond and ne're-do-well, Stephen eventually settled in the Northwest to waste his life on roleplaying games.

Once that RPGA guy, Stephen is now a developer in RPG R&D where he doesn't create the traps ¦ he just makes them deadlier. He also teaches a class on roleplaying design for the Art Institute of Seattle, molding the minds of young and upcoming designers. Be afraid. Be very afraid.

Gamer Lifestyle

02/14/2008

Dragon Editorial Archive
Dragon 361

Hi folks,

I wanted to evangelize for a few moments regarding the **D&D** website, as well as extend an invitation to the player community.

My name is Bart Carroll, one of the Online Media Producers here at Wizards of the Coast. For the past several years, I've had the challenging/hectic/blissful opportunity to help produce the **D&D** website. These days, 4th Edition is close on the horizon -- and fast approaching -- which means extremely exciting times for every aspect of the game, not the least of which (from my perspective) includes the official website. Just the other day a pit fiend broke loose and caused all sorts of commotion. I believe he has been safely contained for now, though we did lose several interns in the fight, plus a copier that was one day away from retirement (sorry, stolen joke).

Our website team has also expanded, and it now includes Chris "Conan" Youngs, who handles the *Dragon* and *Dungeon* magazine components; Steve Winter, who deals with the **D&D** Minis side; Jeff Simpson, the guy in charge of the **RPGA** fun; Stacy Longstreet, our art director; Chris Perkins, who keeps an eye on all of our shenanigans; plus our web developer, Mark Jindra. If you ever wish to send us comments, questions, or feedback, we constantly look for them in the dndinsider@wizards.com mailbox.

The Other Side of the Fence

Dragon and *Dungeon* Magazines have now been added to the site as **D&D Insider** subscription components, but -- as we originally announced at Gen Con -- the free component of the website will remain as well.

The magazines will add the excellent columns, departments, and features that have long been part of their print versions. On the other side of the subscription fence, the free component of the website will continue its mandate of -- in part -- introducing our current line of products. We believe strongly in our goal of producing the absolute finest roleplaying books and accessories for use in your game, and we need the website to do its job of best presenting our current releases. That's why we list them right there on the front page, host interviews with the authors, select excerpts, and preview what's coming up.We want you to know which supplements, adventures, and miniatures are coming out, we want you to know you can always find that information here, and we want you to be as excited about using these releases as we are about creating them.

But that being said . . . the **D&D** website (and here I'm primarily speaking of the free component) looks to be more than mere product endorsement. At least, we'll continue to strive to make sure it's more than that. In part, here's how:

1. This website is meant to make the products you buy as useful as possible for your game, whether by offering web enhancements, adventure hooks, or other tools to support them.
2. This website is meant to answer your questions about the game, through *Ask Wizards* answers, the FAQ, or more conversationally through the **D&D** *Podcast*s.
3. And, this website is meant to help celebrate the game, the gamers, and gaming lifestyle.

Gamer Lifestyle

All of which leads up to that invitation I mentioned in the first paragraph. As part of celebrating Gamer Lifestyle, we're planning a new column under that very moniker. In essence, the column should serve as a cultural report on things of potential interest to the **D&D** community. And we request your participation -- in fact, I don't really feel we could do it without you.

What kind of things are we specifically talking about? For the most part, those things beyond the **D&D** product line (since, as stated earlier, the website does plenty already covering them). In recent years, for instance, *Dragon* Magazine has run its *First Watch* column, largely examining products of note from around the industry. We're looking to expand on this idea.

Take movies, for instance. When it comes to those that might appeal to your fellow gamers or have elements they could adapt and incorporate into their games, which releases would you recommend? Or, since fair's fair, which movies directed at gamers might not be worthy of their ticket purchase? Same with DVDs. Looking back at old favorites or lesser known treasures, which movies from the dusty archives of your collection do you play for inspiration, use to set the right mood at the table, or simply show to entertain your friends?

The same goes for books, comics and graphic novels, video games, TV shows, podcasts, and blogs . . . the list goes on, and we'd ask the same question of any of them: What out there would you recommend to your fellow gamers -- whether to inspire or translate into their game, or simply for the sheer entertainment value?

And yes, when it comes to *Gamer Lifestyle*, we're also talking about gaming products as well -- those that go beyond the halls of Wizards of the Coast.

> We have a first taste of *Gamer Lifestyle* as part of this month's *In the Works*.

So How Can You Contribute?

The **D&D** website will collect and assemble, and often times even contribute (since we're also an opinionated bunch) "lifestyle reviews" -- but we're very much interested in hearing what you'd recommend. What's more, we're willing to pay for your opinions. You can send your lifestyle submission to gamerlifestyle@wizards.com.

Acceptance and Payment
We are looking for completed works; when submitting, please submit your lifestyle review as a Word .doc or .rtf file. As with *Dragon* and *Dungeon* submissions, if we're interested in your review we'll let you know within 60 days. Due to the high volume of submissions we receive, we are not able to send you a personal response for every submission. If you do not receive a response (other than a reply confirming receipt of the submission) within 60 days, your submission was rejected.

As opposed to a per-word rate, the website pays a set $35 for a review of 200-500 words.

In the event we buy your review, you will assign your rights to us. That means that once your contract is signed, we'll own all rights to your submission. The assignment contract (as well as applicable tax forms) will be sent out shortly after an article has been accepted. You'll receive the contract by email, and you'll be asked to sign a hard copy and return it to us, along with an invoice form. If you're under 18, a parent or guardian must sign or co-sign your contracts. Once we have purchased a review, it might not appear on the website for several months, so be patient.

Thanks,
Bart

Where's the Beef?

by Chris Thomasson
12/21/2007

Dragon Editorial Archive
Dragon 361

Back when I was a kid and this Wendy's campaign launched, I thought it was about the funniest thing ever. I remember seeing that little old lady peering down at her burger myopically, and musing aloud on one of life's most intriguing questions. Where's the beef, indeed?

Few commercials attained the same magnitude of impact as that Wendy's ad, so it's no surprise that it stuck in my brain. At some point in my previous tenure on **Dragon**, it rose to the surface in some meeting or another, when I burst out with "Where's the beef?" when asking why a particular article lacked the cool crunch to back up its otherwise fluffy content.

Since then, the phrase has retained that association for me, and in the past few weeks, I know some variation of the phrase has likely been circling in your heads in regards to the balance of rules content to non-rules content in **Dragon**, compared to issues of the past.

Well, here's what happened. Back in the late spring, when we were putting together a content plan for the magazines from October through the launch of 4th Edition, we talked about what sort of content we should feature. We felt we had two options: The first was that we could continue with the exact same pattern and type of content in the current incarnations of the magazines. The second option was that we could take a step back and re-evaluate what we were trying to accomplish with this content. We opted to explore the latter option, and here are the conclusions we reached.

Giving new rules that won't have relevance in a few months wasn't good for the game, and wasn't a good use of staff resources. It felt a lot like giving Bob, the valued 50-year employee, a computer upgrade the day before his retirement party. Any new 3rd Edition rules bit we give you now just isn't even likely to see play at most tables. If we were to print a new 3.5 prestige class tomorrow. Will having this class improve your D&D experience? More importantly, will it even make it into your game?

We talked about these questions and more, and felt the answers were "No" and "Extremely unlikely." And the same was true as we went down the list of all the rules elements in the game. Monsters? Same situation. Feats? Even less likely to find a place at the table. Magic items? Maybe most likely to see play, but still only minimally. This wasn't a decision we arrived at easily, but we knew that the only thing we stood to gain from continuing with the status quo was the goodwill of the readers, especially following the migration of the magazines to a digital medium. Don't get me wrong for a moment: We value your good will. But with finite resources, and most importantly, a new edition coming out, we felt that the second half of this equation needed to be balanced, which was:

Preparing you for 4th Edition was of the utmost importance. This preparation, even at the expense of more 3rd Edition content, just makes more sense. It's a new edition. It will take some acclimation. It won't happen overnight. We want our content, as much as possible, to give you a running start "to catapult you, even" into the new edition. That's our mission, our goal, our grail. We knew, even back in the spring and before, that the push toward the 4th Edition launch was our first priority. Plus, we wanted to start bringing disenfranchised former players back into the fold. We didn't want you to feel overwhelmed by the new edition "if possible, we wanted you to feel like you already knew how to play when you picked the *Player's Handbook* up off the shelf.

Fourth edition is coming, we're having a blast with it, and we want you to be comfortable with the game come June. We're not ignoring **D&D** 3.5; we're devoting precious writing and development time to it. Our 3.5 focus, though, is on adventures -- to keep you playing, and because we feel they're the most useful at this point in the game's life cycle.

What does this mean? Well, for now, not much. You won't see much of a change in the free content (yes, I felt compelled to point out that we're dropping a hefty dime to get this content contracted, commission art, and pay freelance editors and typesetters to get it to you without expecting any compensation) in the next few months. However, next year, as soon as the powers-that-be will allow, I'll be posting a copy of our Table of Contents for the first 4th Edition issue. It will reveal a lot about the magazines come 4th Edition. Plus, we have a group of talented graphic designers and art directors working to make the new look of the magazines as comfortable as possible with the digital environment, as well as synch them up with the new look of our printed products. We're also exploring as many options as we can to make our editorial content work hand-in-hand with the Insider toolset and community resources, and continuing to explore new ways to bring you innovative ideas we never could have done with the print magazines (our **D&D** cartoons are one fine example -- the next one is already in the works).

Finally, I know some of us ¦ okay, mostly just me ¦ haven't been around as much in the community since #360 was rolling out. But we are (I am) still here. We just recognized that the coming months were going to be crazy. Yes, it's also hella fun, but I've also never been so busy in my entire life. Hell, I've never seen this company so busy, from top to bottom ... or so energized.

The closer we come to launch, the more we'll be sharing, the more of the curtain we'll be able to pull back (heck, check out Bill's Ampersand column if you want to see a pretty good peek at 4th Edition). We know it will be a long five months to wait, but you know what they say about the good things. In the mean time, keep playing. In the next several months, we're going to keep bringing you more ways to experience and learn 4th Edition before the new game launches, along with all the great 3.5 adventures in Dungeon.